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The Numidians 300 BC–AD 300

William Horsted • Illustrated by Adam Hook

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The Numidians 300 BC–AD 300

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Series editors Martin Windrow & Nick Reynolds

THE NUMIDIANS 300 BC–AD 300

INTRODUCTION

The light Numidian cavalry were among the most well-known horsemen in the ancient world. Riding without saddles or bridles, carrying only hide shields for defence and clutching a handful of light javelins, they were renowned for their darting attacks, swift retreats and prowess in skirmish. Numidian horsemen are easily recognized through their famous depiction on Trajan's Column in Rome. The portrayal of 'dreadlocked', barefoot riders in simple tunics astride tiny ponies is the image of the Numidians almost universally reproduced. Yet Numidian armies also included infantry, elephants and missile troops, such as slingers and archers. There is also evidence that the Numidian kings may have maintained an elite, armoured cavalry unit, with uniquely decorated shields. A reappraisal of both the literary and non-literary sources for the appearance, weapons and equipment of the Numidians in this book will help readers to see past the simplistic, yet frustratingly ubiquitous, representation of Numidian cavalry, and reveal a far greater variety of images of the types of troops fielded by this fascinating culture.

Coin of the Numidian king Masinissa, showing the pointed beard and carefully dressed hair so common in images of Numidian men. Masinissa wears a *diadem* in his hair, a 'Hellenistic' symbol of monarchy. (Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. http://www.cngcoins.com/ Wikimedia/CC BY-SA 2.5)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Numidians were a tribal, nomadic people who occupied an area of North Africa that roughly corresponds with northern Algeria and western Tunisia in the last three centuries of the first millennium BC. Their territory was limited by the hinterland of the Punic city of Carthage to the east, in what is now eastern Tunisia, and the lands of a related nomadic group, known as the Mauri, to the west. The somewhat mysterious Gaetulians lived on the Saharan fringe to the south. The Numidians make little impression in the historical records of the Greeks or Romans until the First Punic War (264–241 BC), fought between Carthage and Rome, when the Greek historian Polybius (1.19) mentions the Numidian cavalry for the first time.

By the outbreak of the Second Punic War in 218 BC, a number of hitherto disparate Numidian tribes appear to have coalesced into two rival kingdoms. In the east, the Massyli under their king Gaia were dominant, and their capital was Cirta (modern-day Constantine in Algeria). The larger, western part of Numidia was controlled by the more powerful Masaesyli, whose king Syphax ruled from the city of Siga (near modern-day Oran in Algeria). During the course of the war the Masaesyli and Massyli were both at different times allied to Carthage and Rome, and supplied their famous light cavalry to both sides. The Romans worked hard to cultivate Syphax's friendship, and helped

to train his troops in the techniques of infantry warfare. Despite the Romans' efforts, by the time of the Roman general Scipio's invasion of Africa in 204 BC, Syphax had chosen to side with Carthage, an alliance cemented by his marriage to Sophonisba, the daughter of the Carthaginian general Hasdrubal.

Gaia's Massyli supported the Carthaginians for much of the war, and he sent his son Masinissa to lead cavalry against the Romans in Spain. After Gaia's death in 206 BC, Masinissa struggled to secure control of his father's kingdom in a series of battles with his relatives. Almost as soon as he gained the throne, he was attacked by Syphax and soundly defeated. Masinissa survived the battle and fled into the mountains, from where he led a band of loyal horsemen in a guerrilla campaign. Masinissa was able to evade Syphax's attempts to kill or capture him, and despite suffering further defeats was eventually able to join Scipio's Roman expeditionary army with a small force of cavalry. He quickly distinguished himself and was instrumental in the destruction by fire of a combined Carthaginian and Numidian camp, killing many. Masinissa, with Roman help, soon defeated Syphax at the battle of Cirta in 203 BC and took him as a prisoner to Cirta, the Numidian capital, which he easily subdued.

At Cirta, Masinissa met Syphax's beautiful young wife, Sophonisba. According to the Roman historian Livy (30.12–15), Masinissa fell instantly in love with Sophonisba, and tried to marry her immediately to prevent her being sent to Rome with Syphax as a Roman prisoner. When Scipio intervened to stop the wedding, Masinissa gave Sophonisba poison, and she died in his arms.

With Scipio's support, Masinissa regained his father's kingdom, and also took control of much of Syphax's territory. The Second Punic War ended with a Roman victory at the battle of Zama in 202 BC, and Masinissa consolidated his position as the first king of a united Numidia with enthusiastic Roman patronage. The Romans were determined to keep a powerful ally in Africa to prevent the Carthaginians from threatening their hard-won hegemony in the western Mediterranean.

Numidia thrived under Masinissa and his son Micipsa. Masinissa died in 148 BC, two years before the Romans destroyed Carthage at the end of the Third Punic War (149–146 BC). He had reigned for 55 years, and Micipsa ruled for a further 30. In that stable period Numidia developed significantly. Though nomadic pastoralism continued, settled agriculture increased. Villages expanded and towns became more urbanized, and trade grew through access to former Carthaginian ports. Masinissa and Micipsa maintained the support of Rome by supplying grain to feed the Roman Army, and more importantly provided large numbers of Numidian light cavalry, infantry and elephants to serve as auxiliaries to the Roman legions.

The Numidian kings tried to involve themselves in the Greek-dominated 'Hellenistic' culture of the eastern Mediterranean. In their coin portraits, Masinissa and Micipsa often wore a *diadem*, a white ribbon tied around the head and recognized as a Hellenistic symbol of monarchy. They financed the construction of Greek-style buildings in their cities, and one of Masinissa's sons even competed in the Panathenaic Games.

When Micipsa died in 118 BC, control of Numidia was divided between his two sons, Hiempsal and Adherbal, and his nephew Jugurtha, who

Numidian royal tomb from Thugga (modern-day Dougga in Tunisia). This is one of a series of similar 'tower' tombs from Numidia dating from the 3rd–2nd centuries BC. (DEA/C. Sappa/Getty Images)

had led a Numidian contingent in support of the Roman Army in Spain. Jugurtha wanted the crown of Numidia for himself, and assassinated Hiempsal. Adherbal appealed to the Roman senate, who intervened to divide Numidia. This was not enough for Jugurtha, who attacked Adherbal, defeated and executed him. The Romans were forced to declare war in 111 BC, and after a protracted conflict, captured Jugurtha in 106 BC.

Over the next 50 years, Numidia enjoyed another period of stability. In 46 BC, however, Juba I chose to align his kingdom with the wrong side in the Roman republican civil wars. Julius Caesar defeated Juba and his Roman allies at the battle of Thapsus in 46 BC. After Juba's suicide following his defeat in battle, the kingdom of Numidia was dismantled, and most of its territory incorporated into the Roman Empire.

NUMIDIAN FORCES

Cavalry

Numidia produced the most effective light cavalry in the ancient Mediterranean. Despite their rudimentary tack, lack of armour and simple weaponry, Numidian horsemen were a key component of both the Carthaginian army and the armies of republican and imperial Rome. The Numidian cavalry were so important to the 'war machines' of Carthage and Rome that they functioned as the primary resource of the Numidian kingdom; the generous provision of horses and skilful riders gained the Numidian kings prestige, protection and investment from their more powerful neighbours.

The Numidian cavalry's strength lay in unmatched horsemanship. Numidian men learned to ride as young boys, and spent much of

Photograph of the famous scene on the frieze on Trajan's Column, showing a unit of 14 Numidian or Moorish cavalry attacking the Dacians during the emperor Trajan's Dacian Wars of AD 101–106. The appearance of the horsemen barely changed in the years following the conclusion of the Punic Wars in 146 BC. They carry characteristic Numidian round cavalry shields and have braided hair and beards. Unfortunately, their javelins have been lost. (Prisma/UIG/Getty Images)

their adolescence on horseback, mastering their equestrian skills and practising throwing javelins while hunting. They did not use saddles or bridles. According to the Greek geographer Strabo (17.3.7), who wrote at the start of the 1st century AD, Numidian horses were held with a single rein attached to a simple collar, which the animals wore around the neck, and guided by touches from a slender wooden rod. The horse's collar was woven from vegetable fibre or hair, and this can be seen clearly on the neck of the Numidian cavalry horses depicted on Trajan's Column. Numidians developed such a bond with their horses that some would even follow their master around like a dog.

After a lifetime on horseback, riders were capable of astonishing feats. The Roman historian Livy noted (23.29) that some Numidians engaged the enemy accompanied by a spare horse, onto which they would jump when their first mount began to tire, even in the thick of battle.

Numidian horses were small, fast and hardy. Writing in the late 2nd century AD, the Roman naturalist Aelian (3.2) described their remarkable speed and stamina and their slender appearance. They may not have been beautiful, but their hardiness made them ideal military animals. They were cheap and easy to feed as they were content to eat only grass and rarely needed to drink (Appian, *Punic Wars* 2.11). According to Aelian (3.2), Numidian horses needed little maintenance compared to the more delicate beasts ridden by the Roman cavalry: their riders appeared to hardly care for their horses, and let them graze as soon as they dismounted. They were never washed or groomed, their hooves were never cleaned and their manes and tails were left unbrushed.

Livy (35.11) described Numidian horses as having an awkward, ungraceful appearance because they trotted with their heads stretched out and their necks stiff. This depiction matches the galloping horses shown on the reverse of some coins issued by the Masaesylian king Syphax, and also the animals ridden by two terracotta horsemen that once decorated Greek *askoi* from Canosa (Rostovtzeff 1946: 266). The latter two beasts appear very ungainly and stiff-necked, as they gallop, open-mouthed; they certainly seem to have been portrayed this way on purpose, although in reality they would probably have been larger in relation to their riders. This is also true of the Numidian mounts depicted on Trajan's Column.

Scholars have analysed the many horses depicted on Trajan's Column and proposed that the sculptors attempted to differentiate the animals ridden by the Numidian cavalry from those ridden by the Romans. Dixon and Southern (1992: 164) note the distinct head shape, long necks and manes of the North African horses, and the heavier bodies and more slender legs of the Roman mounts.

Numidian horsemen were feared for their way of fighting as much as they were famed for their equestrianism. The Greek historian Polybius described their distinctive tactics. At the battle of the Trebbia (218 BC) early in the Second Punic War, the Roman cavalry were unable to deal with repeated Numidian attacks followed by swift, scattering retreats (Polybius 3.72.9). Two years later, at Cannae, the Numidians employed the same tactics, and although they were not able to inflict many enemy casualties, they lost few of their own men. Crucially, the Numidians kept the Roman cavalry away from the main battle (Polybius, 3.116.5).

ABOVE LEFT
A barb or 'Berber' horse. Numidian horses were smaller, leaner and hardier than their modern descendants. (DEA/B. Langrish/Getty Images)

ABOVE RIGHT
Young Moroccan man riding on a donkey laden with empty fuel cans on his way to collect petrol in Algeria to smuggle back to Morocco. He is riding without a bridle, using only a stick to guide the animal, in exactly the same way that Numidian cavalrymen controlled their mounts. The Numidians do not appear to have used camels in warfare. Julius Caesar captured 22 camels belonging to Juba I from the town of Utica during his African campaign (*The African Wars* 64), but these were probably baggage animals. Camels were also used to pull ploughs and carts. (FADEL SENNA/AFP via Getty Images)

The Numidians' fast horses and unrivalled horsemanship gave them the greatest mobility on the battlefield. They could dart in close enough to the enemy to attack and wound with their javelins, but were able to withdraw just as quickly to avoid being forced into hand-to-hand combat with a better-armed, and -armoured, opponent. The Numidian cavalry did not normally wear body armour or helmets because it would have reduced their mobility, and therefore their effectiveness. Their distinctive fighting style meant that armour was unnecessary, however; the speed and manoeuvrability of their horses was both a means of attack and defence. As Polybius notes, the Numidians did not kill or wound great numbers of the enemy, but neither did they suffer great numbers of casualties. Their usefulness on the battlefield was not as 'shock troops': they could not smash into massed ranks of infantry in the way that 'cataphracts' or other heavy cavalry units might. With their swift, jabbing attacks and accurate javelin volleys, the Numidians would harass and disrupt enemy formations on the battlefield, and either keep them away from the main battle, or lure opponents out of defensive positions to a place where they could be engaged with heavier cavalry or infantry units and destroyed.

These tactics developed out of the low-intensity warfare practised by nomadic North African tribes throughout this period. The speed and great endurance of the Numidians' horses, and the tactic of attacking opponents from a safe distance with javelins, gave tribes the ability to carry out raids on their neighbours' territory while minimizing the risk of being killed or wounded themselves. This allowed rivals to compete for grazing rights and water access without suffering unsustainable losses among their adult men, who provided protection and security to the tribe, and without whom the tribe would be at the mercy of a more powerful group. These tactics were also used by Numidian tribes in raids on Carthaginian territory, and it is probably this that alerted the Carthaginian generals to the military potential of the Numidian cavalry.

The Numidian cavalry were of equal value away from the battlefield. During the Second Punic War, Hannibal and other Carthaginian generals made use of Numidian horsemen throughout their campaigns.

The Numidians would range far ahead of the main column to carry out reconnaissance, raid Roman camps, burn crops and prevent the Romans from foraging for food and collecting water. This gave the Carthaginians the ability to maintain pressure on their enemy even when the Romans were avoiding meeting them in pitched battle, and helped to hinder the Roman capacity to continue the war. Unfortunately, during the course of his long campaign in Italy, Hannibal lost most of his Numidian cavalry. Livy records (26.38) that in 210 BC, 500 Numidian horsemen were killed or captured in an engagement in the city of Salapia. They were caught by surprise, and despite being unable to make use of their horses in the narrow streets, resisted their attackers bravely. All but 50 were killed. This was a serious loss to Hannibal, more so than the loss of the city itself, because he was never again able to regain his superiority over the Romans in cavalry.

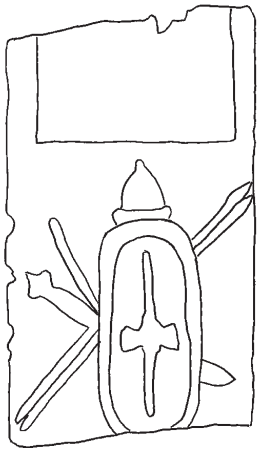
By the time of the battle of Zama in 202 BC, the Roman general Scipio had forged an alliance with the Massylian king Masinissa, and the Romans were able to field a larger and more experienced contingent of Numidian cavalry than Hannibal; this cost him the battle, and the war.

After the Second Punic War, Masinissa took control of much of Numidia. As a Roman 'client king', Masinissa had to pay for Rome's patronage. He did this by supplying large amounts of grain from the fertile farmlands he had been granted in former Carthaginian territory, and by providing Numidian cavalry and elephants to fight as auxiliaries in the Roman Army. Numidian cavalry fought across the Mediterranean. A unit of 200 joined the Roman forces in Greece during the Second Macedonian War (200–197 BC) (Livy 32.27), and more were sent to fight

Rock art depicting 'Berber' horses from Oran, Algeria. This inscription probably dates from the 2nd millennium BC, when the use of domesticated horses spread westward into North Africa from Egypt. Rock-art images of horses have been found at a number of sites north of the Sahara, demonstrating their increasing importance to the peoples of the region. (Werner Forman/Universal Images Group/Getty Images)

The Abizar stele, currently held by the Musée National du Bardo, Algiers. A dozen of these steles have been found in northern Algeria. The bearded figure is always shown astride a small horse, carrying the traditional weapons of the Numidian cavalry: a small, round shield and javelins. Many aspects of these steles remain a mystery. It is not clear what the ring-shaped object in the rider's right hand is supposed to represent, nor is it understood who the small figure on the back of the horse might be. (Drawn by W. Horsted)

The first of four Numidian votive or funerary steles excavated from the El Hofra sanctuary in Cirta (modern-day Constantine in Algeria), now held in the National Museum Cirta (inv. 3.C, p.654). Behind the oblong shield can be seen a sword, two javelins, and a staff. A helmet is perched on top. (Drawn by W. Horsted)



in the Third Macedonian War (171–168 BC) under the command of Masinissa's son, Misagenes (Livy 32.29). Numidians also fought alongside the Roman Army in Gaul, Liguria and Spain.

Numidian cavalry used their characteristic tactics to save the Roman column on two occasions. The Roman engineer and strategist Frontinus records (1.5.16) that when, in 193 BC, the Romans were trapped in a narrow valley by a Ligurian army, the consul Quintus Minucius sent a Numidian contingent to ride ahead to face the enemy. Owing to their unkempt appearance, and the awkwardness of their mounts, the Ligurians thought the Africans posed little threat. The Numidians then pretended to fall from their horses and perform silly tricks. The barbarians were so entertained by the Numidians' performance that they began to relax and allowed their formations to open. Seizing the moment, the Numidian horsemen galloped through the Ligurian lines and into their undefended territory, where they began to set fire to farms and fields. The Ligurians were forced to abandon their positions and allow the Romans to escape the narrow valley.

Livy provides a similar account (38.41). A couple of years later, in 190 BC, when the army of Scipio was travelling through the dangerous valleys of Thrace, about 15,000 Thracians confronted a Numidian unit led by Muttines, who was scouting ahead of the Roman army. Muttines had about 400 cavalry and a small number of elephants. His son, accompanied by 150 horsemen, charged through the middle of the Thracian lines, and Muttines followed with his elephants, while the rest of the cavalry swarmed around the enemy's flanks. Muttines' son then turned and attacked the Thracians from the rear. The Numidian action was so successful that the Thracians were never able to engage the main Roman column.

These two episodes demonstrate why the Numidian cavalry were such a valuable addition to the Roman Army. Even after the absorption of Numidia into the Roman Empire in 46 BC, the Romans continued to recruit light cavalry from the nomadic tribes in the region, both to help police the desert borders of the empire's African provinces, and to support the legions in campaigns overseas. The distinctive tactics of the Numidian cavalry, and their appearance and equipment, remained largely unchanged from the Punic Wars until well into the Roman imperial period.

Infantry

From the time of the Second Punic War onwards, the Numidians regularly employed light infantry. In 213 BC the Romans sent three centurions to the Masaesylian king Syphax to ask for support in their war against Carthage. In return for his alliance, Syphax requested that one of the three centurions remain in Numidia to help train his troops. Livy records (24.48) that Syphax was painfully aware that though his people excelled at fighting on horseback, their lack of experience of infantry warfare put them at a serious disadvantage against the Carthaginians, whose strength lay in their infantry. He realized that he could not hope to match the Carthaginians on the battlefield until he trained and equipped an infantry force of his own. Syphax had no shortage of men; he just lacked the knowledge of how to transform his unruly band into a disciplined army.

The Romans agreed, and the centurion who stayed behind, Quintus Statorius, set about organizing Syphax's troops in the Roman manner (Livy 24.48). He taught them how to form up and manoeuvre on the battlefield and carry out the many duties expected of infantry soldiers, including the building of forts. Statorius' training was so effective that Syphax's new army defeated the Carthaginians the first time they met in battle.

Despite the prowess of their cavalry, the Numidians maintained this infantry force. Infantry were needed not only to counter the massed Libyan and Iberian infantry of the Carthaginian army on the battlefield, but also to defend towns and fortifications, a task for which the highly mobile Numidian cavalry were almost uniquely unsuited. Numidian kings sometimes supplied units of infantry, along with the usual cavalry and elephants, to fight as auxiliaries in the Roman Army. Numidian infantry supported the Romans in the Third Macedonian War and assisted in the Roman siege of Numantia (134–133 BC) in northern Spain. Julius Caesar also had Numidian light infantry in his army during his Gallic campaigns.

Numidian infantry were mostly lightly equipped. The majority did not wear armour and were armed with javelins and light, oval shields. Like their cavalry counterparts, the Numidian infantry relied on their mobility as their defence, and engaged their enemy from a distance. They avoided close contact with heavy, armoured infantry, for whom they were no match.

By the middle of the 1st century BC, the Numidians had developed techniques to incorporate light infantry into their unique way of fighting. During the Roman republican civil wars, Julius Caesar fought a campaign in Africa against the combined forces of a Roman army led by Scipio and Cato, and the Numidian army of Juba I. As in previous conflicts, the Numidian cavalry played a major role but this time light-infantry manoeuvres supplemented their tactics of attack and retreat. The unknown author of *The African War* described (14) Caesar's first encounter with these novel tactics: the lightly armed Numidian infantry dashed out from the enemy lines interspersed among the Numidian cavalry and cast their javelins into the ranks of Caesar's legions. When his men advanced to attack, the Numidian cavalry quickly retreated in their usual manner, leaving their infantry comrades apparently exposed. As soon as the legionaries engaged the Numidian foot soldiers, however, the enemy cavalry charged again, inflicting serious casualties on Caesar's troops, who had been lured from the safety of their formations. At a later battle, the Numidians' combined attacks were so effective that they prevented the Romans from setting up their camp near a water source (*The African War* 69).

Caesar had to retrain his legions in his own new fighting methods to counter the threat posed by the Numidians (*The African War* 71). As with the Numidian cavalry, the innovative and unusual fighting techniques of the Numidian infantry had won them respect from enemies and allies alike.

As well as light infantry armed with javelins, the Numidian army may also have included archers and slingers. Appian records (*Wars in Spain* 14.89) that at the siege of Numantia in 134 BC, the Numidian prince Jugurtha was sent to assist the Roman force with 12 elephants and the units of archers and slingers which were accustomed to going with them

An 'atrophied antennae'-type sword dating from the 4th–3rd centuries BC, excavated from the necropolis of La Osera, Spain, and held in the Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid. A sword of this type is depicted on one of the steles from El Hofra. (Dorieo, Wikimedia Commons License CC-BY-SA 4.0)

Palestinian men using slings to throw stones at Israeli security forces in Gaza. Ancient slingers would have used a similar technique. Note how the slinger in the foreground holds the sling by a loop around his finger. (Mustafa Hassona/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images)

into battle. There is no other reference to these Numidian missile troops in the literary sources, however, other than a brief mention by Caesar in his *The Gallic Wars* (2.7).

Caesar's reference to Numidian archers may be a textual error. The passage in the surviving Latin text of *The Gallic Wars* (2.7) reads '*Numidas et Cretas sagittarios et funditores Baleares*', which translates as 'Numidian and Cretan archers and Balearic slingers', suggesting that the archers were of both Numidian and Cretan origin. A few lines later (2.10), however, Caesar writes that he '*onlnem equitatum et levis armaturae Numidas, funditores sagittariosque pontem*' ('leads all the cavalry and the light-armed Numidians, slingers and archers, across the bridge'). Here, Caesar is surely distinguishing between his Numidian light infantry (presumably armed with javelins) and his Balearic slingers and Cretan archers. It is plausible, however, that the text was corrupted at some point, probably when a manuscript was being copied by hand.

Numidian archers and slingers would have been equipped in a similar fashion to the light infantry. They would probably not have worn armour or helmets, but may have carried shields. A slinger equipped in this way is depicted on Trajan's Column.

Elephants

The Numidian kings regularly supplied elephants to the Romans. Numidian elephants were part of the Roman army that defeated Perseus of Macedonia at the battle of Pydna in 168 BC (Livy, 42.62) and supported the siege of Numantia in Spain in 134 BC (Appian, *Wars in Spain* 14.89). The elephant the Numidians used was the small, African forest species

(*Loxodonta cyclotis*) that once lived in North Africa. Forest elephants are now only found in parts of the forest zone south of the Sahara, in west and central Africa. As well as being much smaller than the familiar bush elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), forest elephants have more rounded ears, and straighter, more slender tusks.

The Numidians adopted the use of war elephants from the Carthaginians, who employed them on the battlefield throughout the Punic Wars. Hannibal's crossing of the Alps with 37 of these animals is well known, but no reliable literary source mentions Carthaginian elephants mounted with 'turrets' or 'castles' on their backs. They appear to have carried only their driver, or *mahout*. There was no need for them to carry armed men: the bulk and ferocity of the elephants were enough to make them a terrifying weapon. Although it has been suggested that the North African forest elephant was too small to carry a turret, according to Polybius (5.84), at the battle of Rapphia in 217 BC, Ptolemy IV of Egypt fielded North African elephants with turrets against similarly equipped Asian elephants of the Seleucid king Antiochus III.

By the middle of the 1st century BC Numidian elephants were also fitted with turrets. Juba I provided his Roman allies with elephants during the African campaign of the Roman republican civil wars. According to the unknown author of *The African War* (86), Caesar captured many of these beasts in 46 BC at the battle of Thapsus and paraded no fewer than 64 of them in front of the city, wearing armour and carrying turrets, in an effort to intimidate the defeated survivors of the battle who had taken refuge within.

Elephants could be as dangerous to the troops of their own side as they were to their opponents. Appian noted (*Wars in Spain* 9.46) their capriciousness and describes an unfortunate episode involving a Numidian elephant at the siege of Numantia, when the Roman general Nobilior employed them in an assault on the city walls. Falling masonry hit one of the elephants on the head and, becoming enraged, it began to attack everything in its path, enemy and ally alike. Its screaming and trumpeting caused the other elephants to panic, and they trampled and scattered the Roman soldiers fighting alongside them.

ABOVE LEFT
African forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*). The North African population of this species that was employed by the Numidians and Carthaginians is extinct. The larger, more familiar bush elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) has rarely been trained. (Michael Gottschalk/Photothek via Getty Images)

ABOVE RIGHT
Punic coin minted in Spain *c.*220 BC showing a small, North African forest elephant and rider, or *mahout*. The concave back, and small, round ears are characteristic of this species. The *mahout* wears a long, hooded cloak, and carries an *ankus*, a special goad used to control the animal. Similar tools are still in use today. (Christophel Fine Art/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

APPEARANCE AND CLOTHING

Sources

The appearance and clothing of Numidian troops can be reconstructed from a range of literary and non-literary sources, including epigraphy (inscriptions and images carved into stone monuments and steles), numismatic evidence (images on coinage), sculpture and archaeology (surviving artefacts).

The works of Greek and Roman writers frequently mention the Numidians, and other North African peoples. Unfortunately, despite numerous accounts of the exploits of the famous Numidian cavalry during the three Punic Wars (264–146 BC) and later conflicts in North Africa, few include detailed descriptions of the Numidians' appearance. Strabo, however, tells us (17.3.7) how North African people enjoyed wearing gold jewellery, growing beards and dressing their hair in braids. They took such care over their hairstyles that they avoided touching one another when they walked, in case their hair should be disturbed. They wore animal skins, including those of bears, lions and leopards, which they also slept in, and dressed in unbelted tunics decorated with wide borders. Strabo also records the North Africans carried animal skins for protection, made small shields out of rawhide, and were armed with javelins with wide heads.

Writing at a similar time, Livy described (35.11) the unimpressive appearance of Numidian auxiliaries: the horsemen were small and slender, just like their mounts, and wore no armour. Their only weapons were javelins. These accounts are frustratingly brief, so we must look to other sources for evidence of the Numidians' clothing and appearance.

Published in *The World's History, Volume IV: The Mediterranean Nations*, edited by Dr H.F. Helmolt (William Heinemann, London, 1902), this drawing depicts the scene on Trajan's Column showing Numidian or Moorish cavalrymen. Some interesting details are visible in this drawing that have since been lost on the original. Two of the central figures wear what appear to be wide bands in their hair. At the top of the picture, the overhand grip used by the horseman to hold their javelins can be seen clearly. (The Print Collector/Print Collector/Getty Images)

A number of stone steles have been found in northern Algeria and Tunisia on which images of Numidian chieftains and other figures are carved. Details of clothing, hairstyles and beards are visible in many cases. As these are often 'royal portraits', however, it cannot be assumed that they represent the appearance of ordinary Numidians. Of course, this is not the case for the most famous artistic portrayal of Numidian soldiers: the unit of 14 mounted cavalrymen shown in such wonderful detail on Trajan's Column. Completed in AD 113 to commemorate the emperor Trajan's victory over the Dacians in his wars of AD 101–106, Trajan's Column is decorated with a 200m-long frieze showing the progress of the campaign, scene by scene. It is the best visual source for the appearance, weapons and equipment of the Roman Army during this period. This includes allied troops such as the Numidian cavalry who accompanied the Romans as auxiliaries.

In Scene 64 of Trajan's Column, the Numidian cavalry are shown attacking the Dacians, and much detail is visible. It is possible, for example, to see how the riders' short tunics were tied over one shoulder; how the cavalrymen grasped their distinctive small, round shields; to see the Numidians' ringleted hair and beards; and the woven collars with which they guided their horses in place of bridles. The relief carving has been surprisingly well preserved, though the polychrome paint and metal detailing has not survived. This means the javelins and other weapons that the Numidian horsemen may have originally carried have been lost, and we have no clue as to whether the tunics were dyed a particular colour.

Coin portraits are our best source for the appearance of Numidian rulers such as Syphax, Masinissa and Juba I, especially the way their hair and beards were styled. Coins show us only how each king *wished* to be portrayed, however, both to a domestic audience and to foreigners in neighbouring states into which the coins would travel through trade. On some coins, Numidian kings adopted a 'Hellenistic' appearance reminiscent of coin portraits of monarchs from the eastern Mediterranean, probably to make themselves and their kingdom appear to be part of wider Greek culture. Portraits of Numidian kings on their coins do not, therefore, necessarily show us how the kings, or their subjects, usually appeared. The reverse of Numidian coins – i.e. the side opposite to the obverse, or 'head' – can also be useful: several show images of mounted horsemen in which their tunics and billowing cloaks can be seen.

There is a terracotta statuette of a wounded Numidian 'chieftain' in the Louvre in Paris. This small mounted figurine was originally part of the decoration of a Greek water jug, or *askos*, and was found in a grave in Canosa, Italy. It has been very well preserved, and the clothing, equipment and physical appearance are crisply portrayed. There was another, similar figurine representing a Numidian horseman in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, but it was sold in the 1950s. Fortunately, a photograph and description survive in a 1946 article by M. Rostovtzeff. These statuettes, which likely date from the late 3rd to the early 2nd century BC, were probably copied from reliefs on a monumental frieze depicting a battle of the Second Punic War, when Numidian horsemen were conspicuous in their role as the main light cavalry of the army of Hannibal. They provide the best sculptural source for the appearance of Numidian troops.

Coin of Syphax, showing his portrait (obverse) and a galloping Numidian horseman with a streaming cloak (reverse). Here Syphax has a 'Greek' appearance: his beard is shorter and less pointed than in other portraits and he wears a *diadem*, a white ribbon worn in the hair by Hellenistic kings. The horse's head is stretched forward, and the neck is stiff, matching Livy's description of Numidian cavalry (35.11). (Photo © Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved)

Terracotta statuette of a wounded Numidian chieftain mounted on a small horse, without a bridle, originally part of the decoration on a Greek water jug or *askos*, and now in the Louvre (Cp 5223). The chieftain wears a short, fringed tunic. He is carrying a small shield, and a sword hangs from a baldric on his left side. (Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre)/Hervé Lewandowski)

Large stele from Tirekbine, near the Numidian capital of Cirta, representing a Numidian chieftain or king. Cirta was the capital of the Massylians before Numidia was unified, and so this may be an ancestor of Masinissa. Note his unusual hairstyle. (Drawn by W. Horsted)

Little clothing survives from the ancient world – organic materials such as wool or leather soon decompose unless, in rare circumstances, they are preserved. In 1947, however, a fragment of a fringed leather tunic similar to those worn by figures on a number of Numidian steles was found in southern Algeria. Carbon dating suggests it was made around AD 600, and had survived in the very dry conditions found on the edge of the Sahara desert.

Appearance

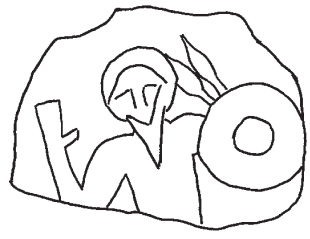
The Numidians were part of the North African cultural group now known as the Berbers. They were African, but shared the physical characteristics of other Mediterranean populations such as those from Spain or Sicily, rather than those from sub-Saharan Africa or the Middle East (Brett & Fentress 1996: 4). The Numidians were therefore 'olive' skinned, with dark brown or black hair that could have been straight, wavy or curly.

Strabo (17.3.7) noted the particular care that Numidians and other North African people took over their hair, which was often carefully braided or dressed into elaborate styles. 'Libyan' men with long braids

and pointed beards feature in paintings in Egyptian tombs from as long ago as 1300 BC. Two large steles discovered near Tirekbine, near the Numidian capital of Cirta, portray male figures, possibly Massylian chieftains or kings, with their hair prepared in unusual ways. One has hair shaped to resemble an inverted crescent, on the other the hair is sculpted into a large ball around the head. In some of their coin portraits, Numidian kings appear to have hair twisted into rows or waves, and as the terracotta figurines that once adorned Greek *askoi* have hair dressed in a similar fashion, it is likely that this was a style commonly worn by Numidian men. Juba I, who ruled eastern Numidia during 60–46 BC, is shown with a very impressive mop of braids in a bust, on his coins, and on a lapis lazuli intaglio now kept in the Bibliothèque national de France in Paris (BnF, Cabinet des Médailles, Chabouillet, 2062).

Numidian men paid similar attention to their beards. These were often long, and trimmed into a sharp point that jutted outward from the chin. The horsemen portrayed on the dozen steles in the so-called Abizar series discovered in the Kabylia region of northern Algeria, which probably date from the 3rd century BC, all have beards of this type, and both the terracotta statuettes of Numidian cavalrymen have pointed beards; the figurine that was once held by the Victoria and Albert Museum sported a particularly fine example. Several Numidian kings also have beards styled in this way in their coin portraits.

Livy described Numidian cavalrymen as small and slender (35.11). There may be a little 'historical licence' in this depiction: Livy is known more for his vivid narratives than for his accuracy. Numidian soldiers probably were quite small framed, however, and slender, at least by modern standards. Like their horses, they were renowned for their hardiness and endurance, and ability to survive on meagre rations (Appian, *Punic Wars* 2.11).

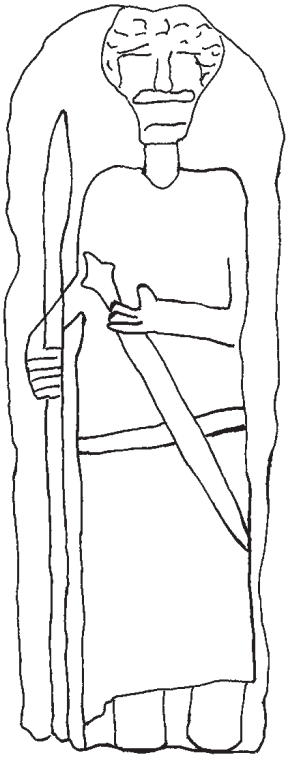


Small stele of the so-called Abizar series, discovered in the Kabylia region of northern Algeria and now held in the Musée national du Bardo, Algiers. In this example, only the upper torso of the horseman remains, as much of the stone has been lost. The horseman has a sharply pointed beard and a high, round hairstyle, and carries the traditional accoutrements of the Numidian cavalry – a small, round shield and two javelins. (Drawn by W. Horsted)

Clothing

Numidian clothing was made of animal skins, leather and wool. Strabo tells us (17.3.7) that African people wore clothes made of the skins of bears, leopards and lions, but no animal skins are clearly shown in surviving Numidian epigraphy. The horsemen shown on the Abizar steles probably represent tribal chieftains, but unfortunately the artists neglected to depict clothing of any kind.

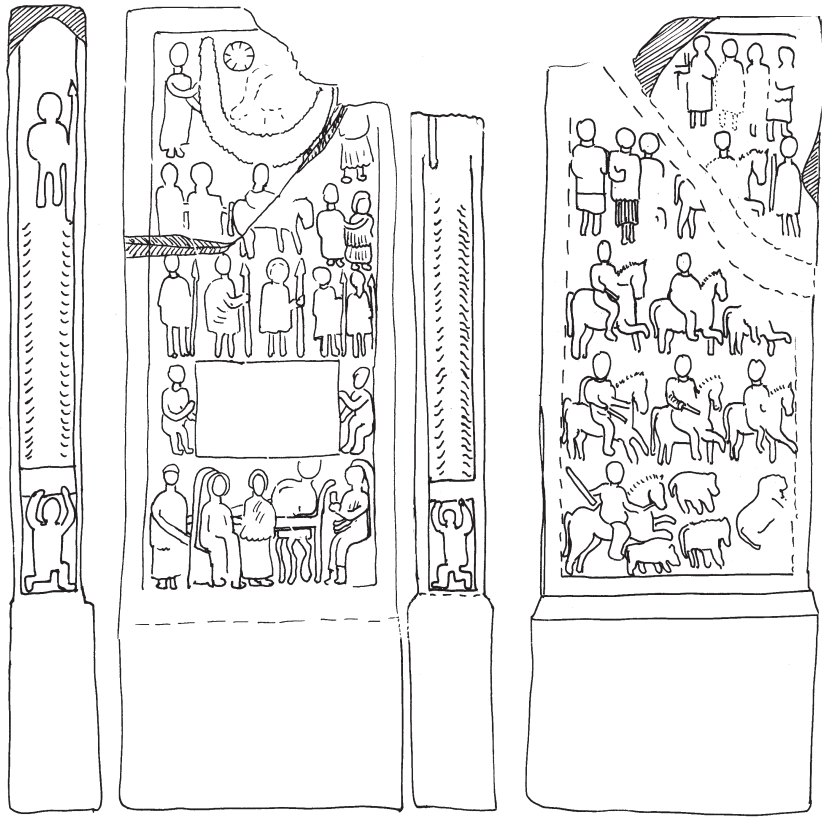
Numidian coin. On the obverse, a portrait of Juba I with a distinctive braided hairstyle. He wears a *diadem* and carries a sceptre. A Greek temple is shown on the reverse, possibly a building at Juba I's capital, Zama. (Photos © Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved)



Large stele from Tirekbine showing a chieftain or king wearing a very long and probably sleeveless tunic. His hair is carefully fashioned into a 'ball' on top of his head, and he carries a sword and a spear. This is the only stele found which shows a Numidian carrying a sword. (Drawn by W. Horsted)

Strabo also records (17.3.7) that North Africans wore unbelted tunics decorated with wide borders. In 1957, the French archaeologist Gabriel Camps 'discovered' an unusual stele in the garden of an Algerian villa belonging to a local civil servant. The figure depicted on the so-called Kerfala stele wears a long, sleeveless tunic with vertical borders and fringes hanging from each side. Several other North African steles show figures wearing tunics or mantles with fringes. One of the Numidian 'chieftains' from Tirekbine wears a knee-length, probably sleeveless tunic with quite long fringes draping from both sides and down the middle. It is impossible to tell from the images alone what material these garments are made from, but the fragment of fringed leather tunic found in southern Algeria and dating from the 7th century AD suggests that leather is likely in this case, too. Writing in the 5th century BC, the Greek historian Herodotus noted (4.189) that Libyan women dressed in leather and wore goatskin cloaks with leather tassels.

Fringed tunics may have been a symbol of status in Numidia: the subjects of these steles were clearly of great enough importance to have their images carved into stone. Also, of the two terracotta cavalrymen from the Canosa *askoi*, only the 'chieftain' wears a tunic with fringes, in this case on the bottom hem, and on the ends of the short sleeves. These small sculptures were probably originally painted, so their tunics may have had borders painted on, but we cannot tell what colour this may have been.



Sketch of a very large stele found in 2007 near the village of Tazrout in northern Algeria, dating from the 2nd–3rd centuries AD and decorated with relief carvings of a funeral feast and hunting scene. Although the carving has degraded over time, some detail of clothing and equipment is visible. The horsemen in the hunting party are dressed in short tunics, one wears a cloak, and they all carry javelins. At the funeral, five guards, or foot soldiers, carry long spears with leaf-shaped heads and appear to be dressed in long tunics, and perhaps also cloaks. (By kind permission of J.P. Laporte)

Whether fringed or not, Numidian elites appear to have worn long, sleeveless tunics. The second Tirekbine 'chieftain' wears a tunic that reaches almost to the ankles and a sword belt strapped around his waist. The stele is simply carved and the stone has degraded so it is not possible to tell if the tunic originally had fringes, but it appears to be sleeveless. A Roman coin also shows Numidian 'royal' figures in ankle-length, sleeveless tunics. The Numidian king Jugurtha was defeated in 106 BC by the Roman general and politician Sulla, with the aid of the Mauretanian king Bocchus. Sulla issued a *denarius* (silver coin; see page 46) with an image of himself seated on a throne, receiving an olive branch from Bocchus, while the captured Jugurtha kneels behind with his hands tied behind his back. Both Jugurtha and Bocchus wear long tunics without sleeves, the folds of which can be seen draped over their knees as they kneel on the floor.

Long tunics would have been unsuitable for horse riding. The cavalrymen depicted on Trajan's Column wear short, sleeveless tunics, gathered around the waist by a thin cord. From the way the fabric folds and drapes, and the fact that it is tied in a small knot over the right shoulder, it is most likely that these tunics were made of wool, rather than leather. The identical nature of the horsemen's clothing suggests that it may have been a 'uniform', like that worn by the Roman soldiers the Africans were fighting alongside. It is plausible that by the 2nd century AD, Numidian or Moorish cavalry attached to the Roman Army wore clothing issued to them when they volunteered to serve. It may be, however, that the sculptors simply repeated the same basic image for the whole unit.

Several coins issued by the Masaesylian king Syphax have images on the obverse of galloping horsemen in streaming cloaks. The terracotta cavalryman from the Victoria and Albert Museum also wears a cloak, which though it is tucked under his backside as he rides, appears to be about thigh length. These cloaks were almost certainly made of wool, and would have provided welcome warmth to Numidian horsemen during the cooler months, or when campaigning overseas.

We have little evidence for footwear. The terracotta 'chieftain' appears to be wearing soft leather boots of some kind: his toes are not visible, whereas they have been carefully sculpted on the foot of the Numidian figurine that was once in the Victoria and Albert Museum. On Trajan's Column, the Numidian or Moorish cavalry are also barefooted. This may suggest that leather boots were worn only by the elite.

WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT

Sources

Examples of Numidian arms and armour are very scarce in modern collections. Most Numidian troops wore no armour, and carried few weapons other than javelins. Only the iron heads of these have survived, deposited in graves alongside the cremated ashes of their owners. Unfortunately, graves containing weapons are themselves rare, and they are concentrated in the western region corresponding to ancient Mauretania and the north-western edge of Numidia. A few leaf-shaped iron javelin heads have been found in several graves near Oran in north-western

Algeria, an area controlled during the second half of the 3rd century BC by the Masaesyli, whose most famous king, Syphax, ruled partly from nearby Siga. The Punic necropolis on the small, volcanic island of Rachgoun, which lies about 2km off the coast and about 5km from Siga, contained some well-preserved examples dating from the 6th and 5th centuries BC.

In the eastern part of Numidia, inhabited by the rival Massyli, graves containing weapons are almost unknown. It is not clear why there should be such a difference in funerary practice across Numidia but the inclusion of weapons in Masaesyli burials may be due to influence from the nearby Iberian Peninsula, where during the 4th century BC the custom of burying warriors with their weapons was widespread. Many examples of Iberian pottery have been found in the necropolis on Rachgoun and at other nearby coastal sites, probably brought by the Phoenicians, who had been trading on both sides of the Alboran Sea since the 9th century BC, transmitting cultural and religious practice as well as material goods.

The important exception in eastern Numidia is the royal tomb known as the Soumaâ, situated in El Khroub, close to the ancient Numidian capital of Cirta. This once magnificent tomb, now ruined, is believed to contain the cremated remains of the Numidian king Micipsa, who died in 118 BC, and possibly also his son Hiempsal, who was murdered by Jugurtha in the same year. The tomb was excavated in 1915 by a team led by the archaeologist François Bonnell. In the burial chamber, surrounding the twice-burned bones of the two men, they found a number of expensive possessions: a silver drinking horn; a silver bowl; a bronze couch; two gold medallions and, crucially, an elite panoply: a sword with a hilt decorated with gold and copper in a sheath made of sandalwood and riveted leather; a bow; a conical iron helmet embossed with ears; a mail tunic; an oval, *thyreos*-type shield; and a collection of spears and javelins.

Apart from the spear and javelin heads from the area around Siga, these are the only examples of weapons and armour known to have been found in the whole of Numidia. Their use in the reconstruction of the armament of Numidian cavalry and infantry is problematic, however. This is a manifestly elite panoply, likely to be that of a king, who – or whose ancestors – may have received the individual items as gifts from the leaders of other Mediterranean states. We know, for example, from Livy about the many gifts given to Micipsa's father, Masinissa, by Scipio and the Roman senate after the defeat of Syphax, which included two complete cavalry armours (30.17); a tunic decorated with palm branches (*tunica palmata*) and a purple toga enriched with golden thread (*toga picta*), which were normally worn by Roman generals when celebrating a triumph; and the traditional symbols of consular rank: an ivory staff, a 'curule' chair and a gold wreath (30.15).

The elite warrior or king entombed in the Soumaâ could also have been given the weapons or armour by his own troops, however, taken from their defeated enemies as war trophies. The Soumaâ panoply could therefore not reflect the equipment of ordinary Numidians at all. This was certainly the opinion of the eminent French historian Gabriel Camps, who asserted that the pointed helmet, oval shield, spear and sword appeared to be the equipment of a warrior from Carthage or the eastern Mediterranean, and not that of a Numidian (Camps 1960: 263). Camps is correct but only to the extent that the Soumaâ panoply does not

The Soumaâ royal tomb at El Khroub as it is today. Only the base remains relatively intact, but relief carvings of characteristic Numidian cavalry shields are still clearly visible at each corner. These may have originally been painted. (Riad Hadjsadok/Wikimedia/CC BY-SA 4.0)

represent the 'usual equipment' of a Numidian, by which we assume he meant the famous light cavalryman, armed only with a hide shield and a clutch of javelins, as he appears on Trajan's Column or in the description of Livy (35.11.7); or his similarly outfitted infantry counterpart; but to dismiss the Soumaâ panoply as being unrepresentative of any Numidian troops at all is to deny the wealth of epigraphic evidence from Numidia, which shows oval shields, cuirasses, swords, and even perhaps a pointed helmet. Another French historian, André Berthier (1981: 169), has pointed out that the oval shield, sword, spears and helmet found in the tomb are very similar to those represented on a stele excavated from the El Hofra sanctuary in Cirta and now held in the National Museum Cirta (inv. 3.C, p.654). Three other similar steles, all of which show shields and other weapons, have been found at the same location.

Camps' assertion that the Soumaâ panoply is not Numidian is also contradicted by the highly detailed weapons friezes which ornamented the Numidian 'royal monuments' or 'altars' situated near Simmithus (modern-day Chimtou) and Kbor Klib in what is now Tunisia. As can be seen in the reconstruction of the Chimtou monument in the nearby Chimtou Museum, these monuments, which dominated their landscapes from hilltops, were built in the style of a Greek or Roman temple. They were symmetrical, rectangular and set upon stepped bases, and punctuated with rows of classical columns. Friezes of highly detailed, veristic, relief representations of cuirasses and shields lined each elevation, possibly accompanied by real helmets and weapons.

The purpose of these monuments is not fully understood, however, nor is the precise date of their construction known. Scholars also disagree about who actually built them. Though they are very large (the Chimtou

monument is 12m long and 9m high), they are not temples and do not appear to have had any specific religious or ritual purpose; their function was probably more about the commemoration of recent victory and the assertion of military power. This power was once assumed to be Roman, and therefore imperialistic: they were perhaps built by Caesar after his triumph over Juba I and the absorption of the Numidian kingdom into the Roman Empire. More recently it has been proposed (Ross 2005) that the Kbor Klib monument at least was built to honour Scipio's defeat of Hannibal at the battle of Zama in 202 BC. Historians have tended, therefore, to define the shields and cuirasses represented on the monuments as 'war booty' – trophies collected from a defeated army by the monument's builder – which in the case of the Kbor Klib monument featured Carthaginian panoplies stripped from Hannibal's dead. There is certainly contemporary precedent for this: the Sanctuary of Athena at Pergamon (built *c.*180 BC) was decorated with a frieze depicting captured armour, shields and weapons tumbled together in a heap.

The art historian Ann Kuttner (2013: 228–48) asserts, however, that the Chimtou and Kbor Klib monuments were built by the Numidian kings in the aftermath of the Punic Wars to proclaim the martial prowess of the Numidian army, and the cultural sophistication of an increasingly confident kingdom, to the Numidian people. Of course, visitors would have been equally impressed by the realistic images of Numidian panoplies, and the explicitly 'Hellenistic' architectural style. The monuments served as a kind of 'static victory parade', like those still held in Moscow's Red Square, but here, rather than columns of marching troops, tanks and missile launchers, the Numidian kings permanently displayed the best of their own military equipment – cuirasses and shields – formed up in orderly ranks for all to see. Therefore, we can safely assume the armour depicted on the 'royal monuments' is Numidian, and in the case of the shields uniquely so, as their flat profile has been found nowhere else.

Kuttner proposes a date of the mid-2nd century BC for the Chimtou and Kbor Klib monuments. They were built at some point from the latter part of the reign of Masinissa (203–148 BC) to early in the reign of his son Micipsa (148–118 BC), and their construction was therefore most immediately intended to commemorate the Numidian role in the total defeat of Carthage in 146 BC. The massive size, hilltop location and almost brazen confidence of these monuments suggests, however,

Reconstructed elevation of the Chimtou 'royal monument' at the Chimtou Museum, Tunisia, showing the position of the cuirasses and round cavalry shields on the frieze. (Philipp von Rummel/Wikimedia/ CC BY-SA 3.0)

Part of the San Omobono monument base, now in the Musei Capitolini, Rome (inv. 2749). The ornately decorated cuirass on the left is based on the 'Hellenistic' type worn by Roman officers. Such elaborate armour would have only been worn on ceremonial occasions. The transverse crests on the two smaller helmets suggest they could have belonged to centurions. (akg-images/Nimatallah)

that their true function was to exult in the rise of the Numidian state itself. During the long period of stability under the reigns of Masinissa and Micipsa, Numidia developed economically, culturally and militarily, and became an important ally of Rome. These monuments were built as much to celebrate these aspects of Numidian society as the military victory over Carthage.

Another ancient visual source could provide clues about Numidian arms and armour. In 1939, a substantial stone monument base was excavated near the medieval church of San Omobono in Rome. The statue it once supported has been lost but the base, which now resides in the Musei Capitolini in Rome, carries a very similar array of relief carvings of armour and shields to those found on the Numidian 'royal monuments'. Yet here, images of greaves and horse armour accompany the round shields and cuirasses. Kuttner (2013: 248–67) suggests that this monument could have been commissioned by the Numidian kings Masinissa or Micipsa to mark their close relationship with Rome, and to promote the Numidian military and Numidian culture in the city of Rome itself.

Although the writings of ancient authors contain many references to the Numidians, those same authors were often not concerned with recording the details of soldiers' arms and appearance. Polybius is, of course, an exception: his description (6.19–42) of the organization of the Roman Army and the weapons and equipment carried by Roman legionaries is invaluable, although he unfortunately does not do the same for the Numidians. Also, ancient authors were often not precise about the terms they used for particular pieces of equipment, such as specific shield or sword types, which can be frustrating for modern historians trying to reconstruct the appearance of soldiers from this period.

The javelin

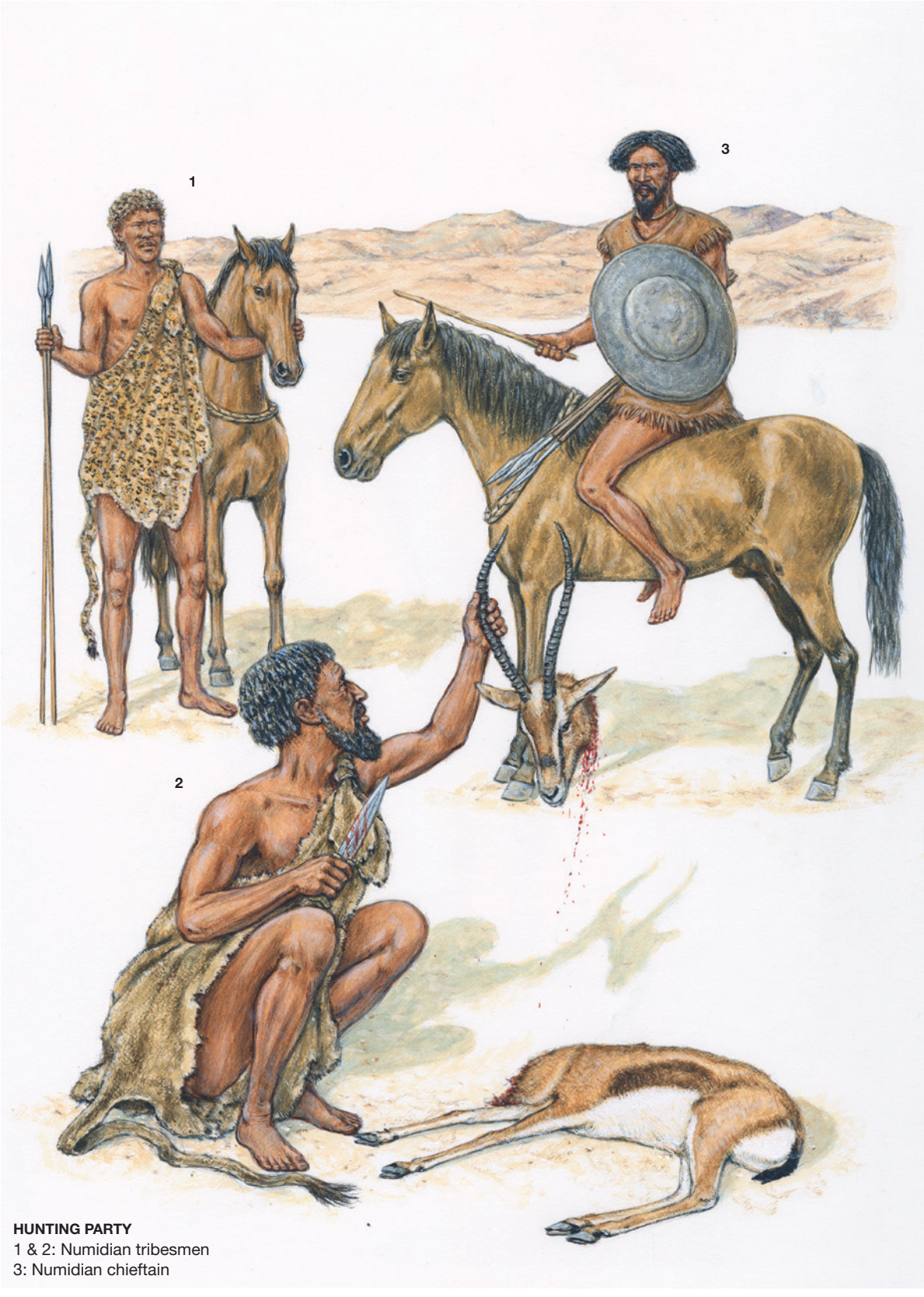
The most important weapon of both the Numidian cavalry and infantry was the javelin. Most Numidian troops carried no other weapons, and their only armour was a shield. A number of leaf-shaped javelin heads have been found in graves near Oran in modern-day Algeria, in what was north-western Numidia, and there were also several discovered in the Soumaâ tomb. These vary in length but are mostly around 30cm long and about 4cm wide at their widest point, with a narrow, circular socket at the base for the attachment of a wooden shaft. No shafts survive so we must look to other evidence for clues as to their likely length.

The Abizar steles all depict a bearded horseman carrying in his left hand a small, round shield with a simple circular decoration, and two or three javelins. The most famous of these steles, and one of the first to be found, is known as the Abizar stele. It has been suggested (Camps 2003) that the shields depicted on these steles are little more than 50cm in diameter, and therefore (if the relative sizes of the weapons are accepted), as the javelins, including both the shafts and the iron heads, are twice the length of the shield, they would be about 1m long overall. This would have been a short, light weapon, designed both to be thrown (or why carry more than one) and for stabbing when fighting hand to hand. The shafts must have been slender, as it would not otherwise have been possible simultaneously to grasp three javelins and the grip of the shield in one hand. Indeed, the inside of the sockets of the javelin heads found in the Soumaâ tomb are only about 1.2cm in diameter. In the tribal context of the Abizar steles, one would imagine these javelins were carried routinely, and used as much for hunting and defence from dangerous animals as for warfare. They may also have functioned as a symbol of membership of the warrior caste.

In the Soumaâ tomb, four much slighter javelin heads were found. These are around 18cm long, and have either a tapering, square-section blade on top of a circular socket, or are of a circular profile from socket to tip. The inside of the sockets measures only about 1cm in diameter. These have been interpreted by some scholars not as javelin heads but as spear butts, like those that feature on hoplite spears, for example, to balance the weight of the spear head, and to be used as a weapon in the event that the head is broken off. It is more likely in this case, however, that these are the tips of very light javelins made to be cast long distances, perhaps with the aid of a leather thong, which was wrapped around the shaft and pulled as the javelin was thrown, thereby imparting spin. A number of similar javelin heads have been uncovered during excavations around the ancient Iberian city of Numantia, which was subjected to a lengthy Roman siege in the 2nd century BC.

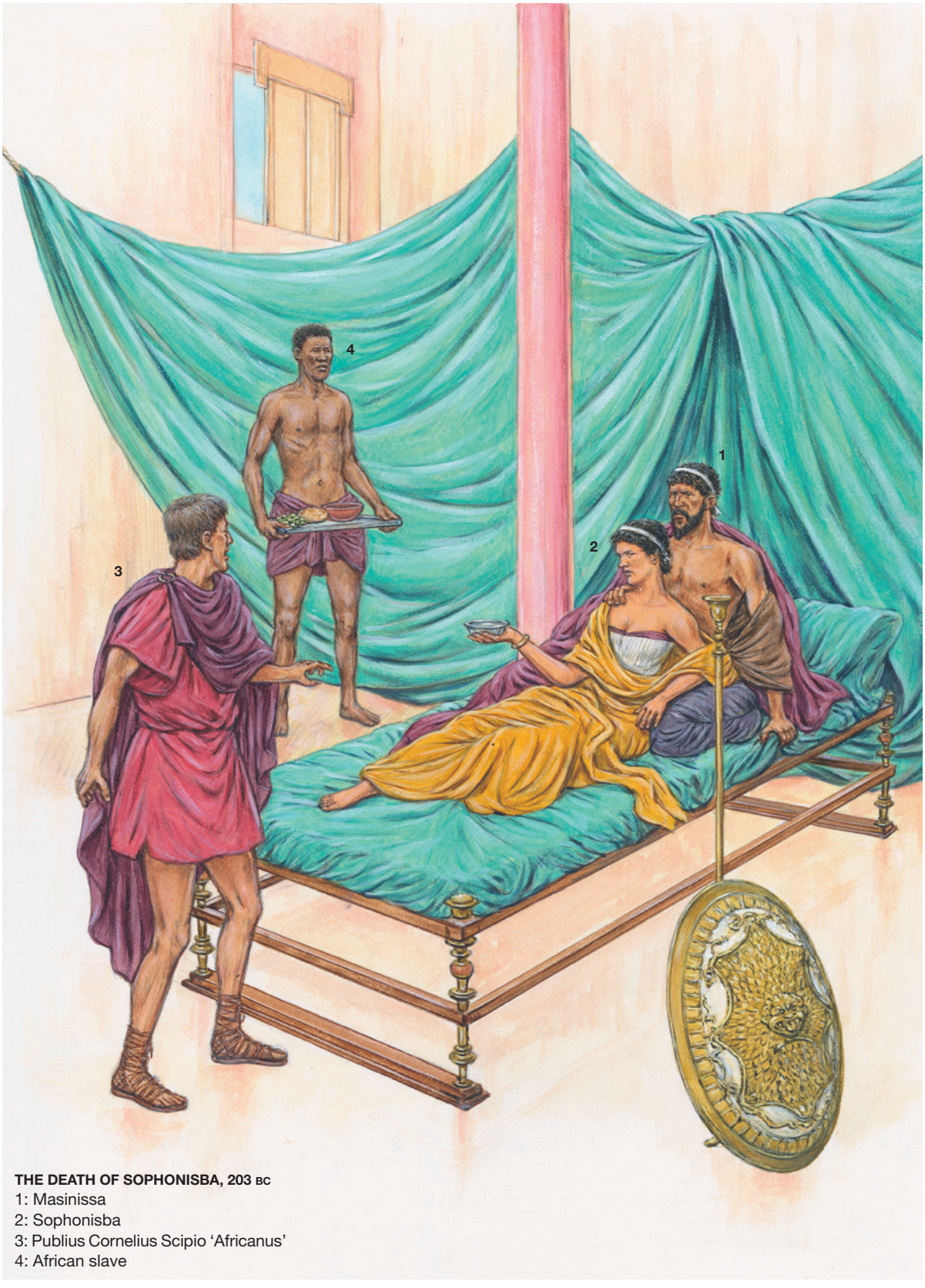
The javelin continued as the main weapon of North African troops for several centuries after Numidia became part of the Roman Empire. This is attested not only by the presence of horsemen equipped in this way in the army of Trajan during his wars against the Dacians, as depicted on Trajan's Column, but also in the literary sources. Herodian (6.7.8), for instance, records that the emperor Severus Alexander benefited from having a unit of North Africans armed with javelins in his campaign against the German tribes in AD 234.

(continued on page 33)

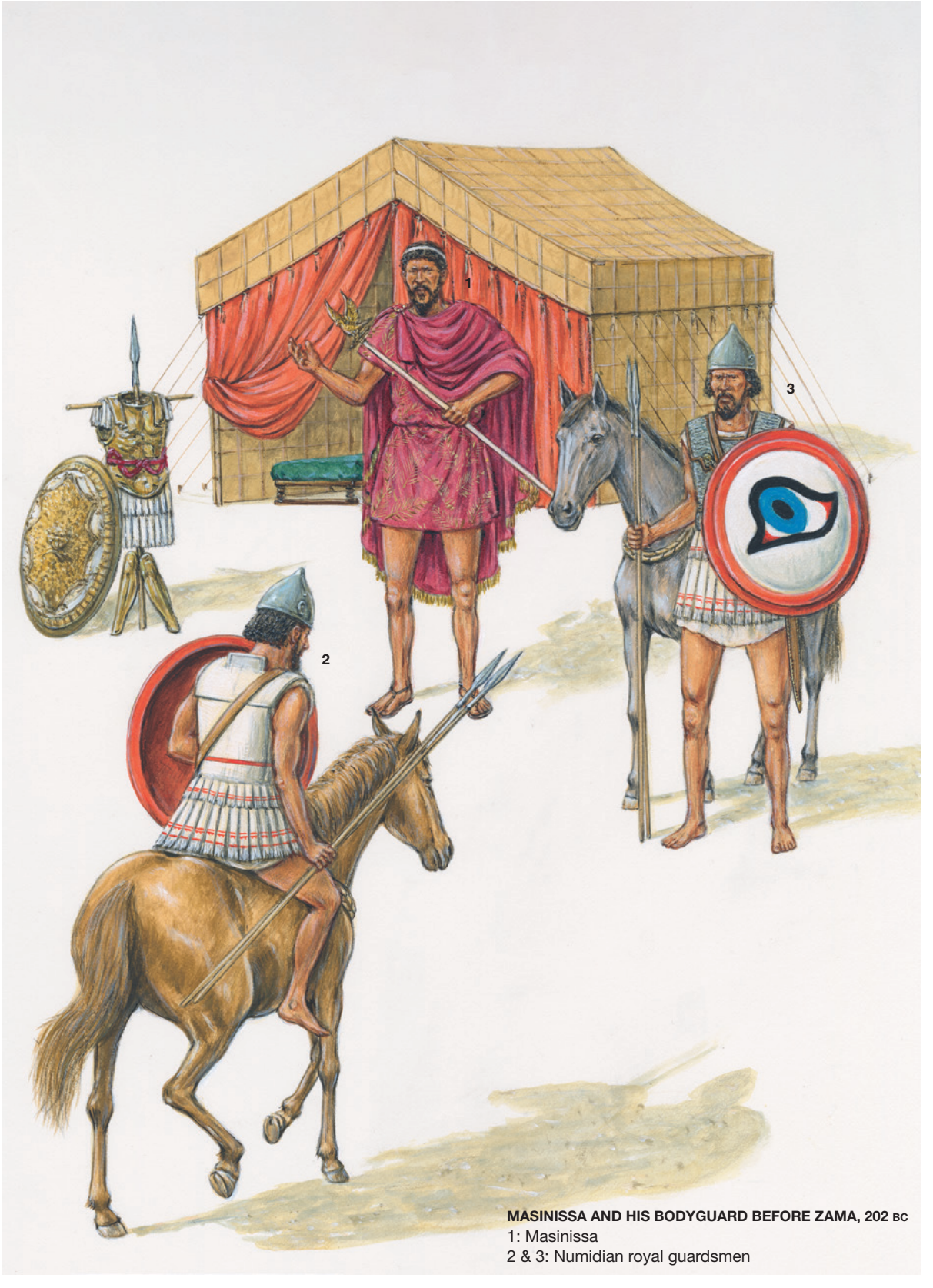


HUNTING PARTY
1 & 2: Numidian tribesmen
3: Numidian chieftain

TRAINING THE NUMIDIAN ARMY
1: Quintus Statorius
2 & 3: Numidian infantry recruits



THE DEATH OF SOPHONISBA, 203 BC
1: Masinissa
2: Sophonisba
3: Publius Cornelius Scipio 'Africanus'
4: African slave



MASINISSA AND HIS BODYGUARD BEFORE ZAMA, 202 BC
1: Masinissa
2 & 3: Numidian royal guardsmen

D

NUMIDIAN LIGHT CAVALRY ATTACK A LIGURIAN VILLAGE
1: Numidian chieftain
2 & 4: Numidian cavalrymen
3: Ligurian tribesman

THE ROMAN–SELEUCID WAR, 190 BC
1: Numidian *mahout* riding an elephant
2: Numidian infantryman
1
2

JUGURTHA AT THE SIEGE OF NUMANTIA, 134 BC
1: Jugurtha
2: Numidian archer
3 & 4: Numidian slingers

AFRICAN CAVALRY IN THE FIRST DACIAN WAR

Section of the Tazrout funerary stele showing five foot-soldiers holding long spears with leaf-shaped heads. Unfortunately, the stone has degraded and little detail of clothing or equipment is visible. (By kind permission of J.P. Laporte)

The infantry spear

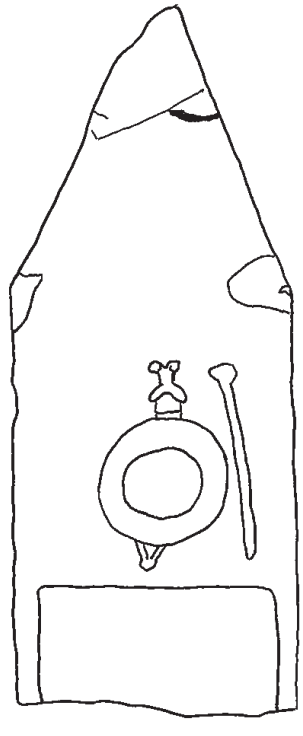
Although depictions of longer, more robust infantry spears are uncommon in Numidian epigraphy, it is likely that some units of Numidian infantry were equipped with this kind of weapon. In 2007, a large funerary stele showing a small number of unmounted spearmen was found near the village of Tazrout in northern Algeria. It probably dates from the 2nd–3rd centuries AD, during the period when Numidia was a Roman province, and is decorated on all sides with reliefs depicting a hunting scene and a funeral feast, presumably held for a deceased nobleman. The hunters are shown riding after hounds in the traditional Numidian fashion, brandishing their javelins in their right hands but among the nobleman's retainers at the funeral are five foot-soldiers holding long spears with leaf-shaped heads. Unfortunately, the stele is not well preserved, but the spearmen are just legible.

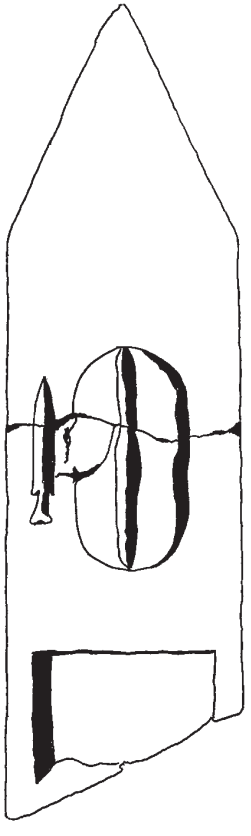
The two steles discovered in Tirekbine show unmounted figures, possibly early Massylian kings, holding similar weapons. The contexts of these rare images – a funeral guard and royal portraits – are suggestive. It may signify that the long, infantry spear had some particular ceremonial function in Numidian society.

Swords

Numidian cavalry did not routinely carry swords. These weapons are absent from nearly all iconography depicting Numidian horsemen: they do not appear on any of the dozen Abizar series of steles, or in the famous image of horsemen on Trajan's Column. The literary sources reinforce this. Livy, for instance, twice notes the Numidians' lack of secondary weaponry: in action against the Ligurians in 193 BC (35.11.7), and in an act of subterfuge at the battle of Cannae in 216 BC, when a unit of 500 Numidian horsemen hid swords beneath their tunics, Livy comments (22.48.1) that these were not their usual weapons. The only artistic portrayal of a Numidian horseman carrying a sword

The second of four Numidian votive steles from El Hofra, now held at the National Museum Cirta (inv. 3.C, p.775). The round Numidian cavalry shield is carved in relief, and the raised, central section is clearly visible. The sword is of the 'atrophied antennae' type popular in parts of the Iberian Peninsula in the 4th–3rd centuries BC. The knobbed staff may have been carried by an officer in the Numidian army, much like the *vitis* (vine staff) carried by Roman centurions. (Drawn by W. Horsted)





The third of four Numidian votive steles from El Hofra, depicting a relief carving of an oblong shield and a short sword, perhaps an 'atrophied antennae' type. Now in the collections of the National Museum Cirta (inv. 3.C). (Drawn by W. Horsted)

is the small terracotta 'chieftain' in the Louvre in Paris, who carries a sword, suspended from a baldric, on his left side. The other terracotta Numidian horseman, which used to belong to the Victoria and Albert Museum, does not carry a sword. The fact that the only artefact on which a Numidian horseman is shown carrying a sword is a portrait of a chieftain suggests that swords were not part of the usual weaponry of the Numidian cavalry.

Even so, the frequency with which swords appear on Numidian steles, and their inclusion in the weapons friezes on the 'royal monuments' at Chimtou and Kbor Klib, in conjunction with both round cavalry shields, and oval, *thyreos* type, infantry shields, suggests that at least some Numidian mounted and foot soldiers did carry them. A sword was also recovered from the Soumaâ tomb.

Three of the four steles from El Hofra display images of swords. On the first, mentioned above, the sword appears as part of a collection of weaponry which mirrors the Soumaâ panoply, suggesting the latter was not an uncommon set of weapons for a Numidian warrior to possess. The sword's hilt has a roughly diamond-shaped pommel, with a slightly elongated end. One of the 'royal' figures depicted on the Tirekbine steles carries a sword on his belt with a hilt of similar shape. The fact that these two very similar hilts appear only on Numidian monuments may mean that this is a local, Numidian design. Unfortunately, this hilt does not closely match any extant swords from this period, so the materials used in its construction cannot be known. The lack of hilts on many swords in modern collections suggests, however, that they were often made of organic materials, such as wood, bone or ivory, which have not been preserved.

On the second stele from El Hofra, held at the National Museum Cirta (inv. 3.C, p.775), a short sword in its scabbard is shown behind a typical small, round Numidian cavalry shield. This sword appears to be of the 'atrophied antennae' type, popular in parts of the Iberian Peninsula in the 4th–3rd centuries BC. This sword may have been taken from an Iberian or Celtiberian warrior by its owner during campaigns in Spain. Swords of this type have long points and slightly waisted blades, which are ideal for both thrusting and slashing. The fact that this sword appears on a stele with the round shield normally associated with Numidian cavalry may mean it was owned by a horseman. Such small, light shields could also have been popular with light infantry, however.

The sword depicted on the third stele from El Hofra, also at the National Museum Cirta (inv. 3.C), is of a similar shape, with a fairly short, straight blade (shown unsheathed) tapering to a long tip. The shape of the hilt in the relief is less clear but the sculptor may have intended to illustrate an 'atrophied antennae' type here too; certainly, the blade is of a similarly 'general purpose' design. The accompanying shield is a typical oval, *thyreos* infantry type.

On the weapons frieze on the 'royal monument' at Kbor Klib another type of sword is represented. Just visible behind a flat, Numidian cavalry shield decorated with a relief carving of the goddess Artemis is the hilt of a sword fashioned in the shape of an animal's head, possibly that of an eagle or a horse. Swords with hilts of this type, now usually referred to by the modern term *falcata*, were common in southern Iberia during

the pre-Roman period. The *falcata* was a single-edged weapon, with a curved blade with a broadened forward section, and a sharply pointed tip. The broadened forward section helped impart extra momentum when the *falcata* was swung, and its long, tapering tip meant it was equally effective for stabbing. Some examples have been found with both edges of the point sharpened for better penetration. A similar sword type, described by modern scholars as a *kopis*, is known from ancient Greece.

The sword recovered from the Soumaâ tomb is the only one found in Numidia so far. It was excavated, still in its scabbard, along with the other grave goods, by Bonnell in 1915, and further investigations, including spectral analysis and X-rays, were carried out in the late 1970s (Ulbert 1979: 333–38). The sword had a short, iron blade, just under 60cm long and 5cm wide, with edges that were parallel for most of their length before tapering to a sharp point about 15cm from the tip. The hilt and pommel have completely disappeared but the high phosphorous content of the metal tang showed that the grip was made of a material of animal origin – bone, horn or ivory – and not wood. No evidence of the shape of the pommel survives but the guard was decorated with gold and copper. The scabbard was made of wood (possibly sandalwood, according to Bonnell), covered in leather and held together with small copper rivets that ran along each side. The mouth of the scabbard was made of bronze and the leather may have originally been decorated with silver plate.

The Soumaâ sword was clearly an elite weapon, made for a noble or king, and as such could plausibly have belonged to the Numidian king Micipsa. It certainly is not the kind of weapon, in terms of decoration at least, that would have been used by an ordinary Numidian soldier. The dimensions of the sword are, however, comparable to weapons known from the same period in other parts of the Mediterranean. The similarity of the blade length and design to the early Republican Roman sword, the *gladius Hispaniensis*, has encouraged some scholars to suggest that the Soumaâ sword is a Roman weapon, perhaps given as a gift to the owner, or collected in wars overseas. Others have gone as far as to attempt to classify it in a typology of 'proto-gladius' swords, as though it demonstrates a stage in the development of the later Roman legionary sword. Given that this is the only known example of its type, from a region that has not provided a single other sword, whether Numidian, Roman or indeed Carthaginian, such attempts at classification are probably best avoided.

Relief carving of a shield depicting the Roman goddess Artemis from the Numidian 'royal monument' at Kbor Klib in Tunisia. The hilt of a *falcata*-type sword is visible at the top-right corner. (Drawn by W. Horsted)

The staff

On two of the El Hofra steles, a slender staff or stick is shown with the other weapons. On one, the staff has a head, or 'knob'. The figure on the Kerfala stele, possibly a Numidian chieftain, also carries a knobbed staff. This may be some kind of mace or club, possibly borne as a symbol of office. In the context of the El Hofra steles, the club may have had a similar function to the *vitis*, or vine staff, carried by Roman centurions. This is plausible because the carving of these steles must have been financed by soldiers of means, or their families, and it is therefore likely that they were veterans who had reached a position of rank within the Numidian army.

Missile weapons

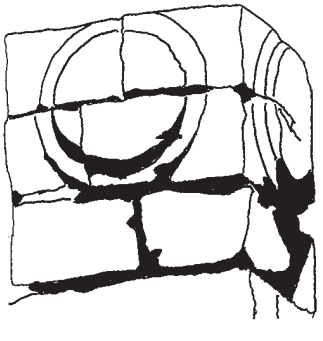
The most respected slingers in the ancient Mediterranean came from the Balearic Islands. Owing to the common employment of Balearic slingers and Numidian troops in both the Carthaginian and Roman armies it is likely that the sling used would have been similar. This was made of a single strip of leather, or woven from vegetable fibre, and widened in the centre to form a 'pouch', in which the missile was held as the sling was whirled around the head. One end of the sling was tied to form a loop, which the slinger slipped over one finger while grasping the other end. To release the missile, the slinger simply let go of the free end of the sling at the correct moment. After the shot, the loop would remain attached to the hand so that the sling could be quickly reloaded. Sling missiles were made of natural stone, baked clay or even moulded from lead, and skilled slingers could make accurate shots at astonishing ranges.

The Numidian bow would have been of composite construction. Strips of sinew were glued and tied to a wooden core, which provided the basic shape. The power of the bow was derived from the combination of the wood, which resisted compression, and the elastic nature of the sinew, which snapped the limbs back in place when the arrow was released. Pieces of horn, or 'nocks' at the limb tips provided extra strength, and these are often the only parts of bows from this period that survive.

Shields

The Numidians employed two types of shields: circular shields usually associated with mounted troops, and oval infantry shields of various designs. It is clear from the widespread portrayal of round cavalry shields on Numidian monuments such as the Abizar series of steles, the Soumaâ tomb, the 'royal monuments' at Chimtou and Kbor Klib, as well as a stele from Volubilis in Mauretania (near modern-day Meknes in Morocco), that this is the native, African shield type. Like the javelin described above, it was almost certainly used by tribal warriors long before the employment of Numidian cavalry in the Carthaginian army against the Romans during the First Punic War. The oval shield, on the other hand, was in widespread use across the Mediterranean during this period, and was probably introduced to the Numidians by the Carthaginians and the Romans during the war with Hannibal, when both powers provided military training to the competing Numidian kingdoms in an attempt to gain their support.

Detail of one of the shield reliefs carved on the base of each face of the Soumaâ tomb. The flat profile is characteristic of Numidian cavalry shields, and is very similar to the shields carried by the Numidian horsemen depicted on Trajan's Column. (Drawn by W. Horsted)



On the Abizar steles and the example from Volubilis, the round cavalry shield appears as two concentric circles, the outer being the rim. A very similar round shield is depicted on one of the El Hofra steles, and here the central circle is clearly protruding from the main face. This probably represents the edge of an extra layer or two of material attached to the front of the shield as reinforcement. There is not enough detail in the images to suggest what material was used in the construction of these simple shields but Strabo (17.3.7) noted that African tribes made their shields of hide, particularly elephants'. Elephant hide is very thick – up to 2.5cm on the back of the animal – and produces very tough leather, ideal for making the faces of shields. The frame was probably of wicker, which could have been woven into a circle rigid enough to hold the thick sheets of elephant hide in the correct shape, while remaining very light. None of the images of these

shields indicates how they were held. They may have had a simple, central hand grip of woven material or wood, or they could perhaps have had two attachments – one for the forearm and one for the hand, like those depicted on Trajan's Column.

On the Soumaâ tomb, two round cavalry shields were carved out of the stone blocks just above the base of each face. These are still clearly visible today, despite the ruined state of the tomb. These shields have a large, flat face and a narrow rim. This basic form is essentially repeated in the profile of the shields on the 'royal monuments' at Chimtou and Kbor Klib, and in the simple shields carried by the Numidian horsemen depicted on Trajan's Column. This shield shape is very different from the pronounced curved profile of the *aspis*-style circular shields so common elsewhere in the ancient Mediterranean.

The shields carved on the Soumaâ tomb have no decoration, though they may originally have been painted. Those portrayed on the weapons friezes on the 'royal monuments', however, are elaborately carved with a variety of individual designs, some of which can be seen today on the reconstructed monument at the Chimtou Museum in Tunisia. The best-preserved example features a huge, distorted eye, perhaps intended to ward off evil or protect the bearer from being harmed in battle. Another carries an *aegis* – a stretched animal skin with the face of a gorgon at its centre, often associated in Roman mythology with Jupiter and Minerva, and invoked as a symbol of protection. Herodotus (4.189) proposed that the *aegis* was a symbol of North African origin, because of its similarity to the goatskin cloaks he saw 'Libyan' women wearing in the region at the end of the 5th century BC. Other designs include a serpent writhing across a flaming torch; a prancing animal, perhaps a lion or a sphinx; and a bust of Artemis. Some of the shields are further enhanced with ornamented rims, carrying repeated wave or laurel designs. This wave pattern is also found on the rim of one of the round shields depicted on the San Omobono monument base.

ABOVE LEFT
Votive or funerary stele with Punic inscription from the Roman city of Volubilis in Mauretania (near modern-day Meknes in Morocco), 2nd century BC. Here the shield and its central 'boss' are incised into the stone. (Dorieo/Wikimedia/CC BY-SA 3.0)

ABOVE RIGHT
Detail of one of the shields from the frieze on the Numidian 'royal monument' at Chimtou, now reconstructed at the Chimtou Museum in Tunisia. The 'eye' may have been a symbol intended to ward off evil or protect the bearer from being harmed in battle. (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom, Chimtou Archiv)

ABOVE LEFT
Detail of Trajan's Column showing Numidian cavalry in action against the Dacians in AD 101–106. The simple tunics worn by the horsemen are clearly shown, including the knot tied over the right shoulder to keep the garment in place. The hand grip on the back of the Numidian cavalry shield is also visible. The Numidians' javelins have been lost. (DEA/A. DAGLI ORTI/De Agostini via Getty Images)

ABOVE RIGHT
This scene on Trajan's Column shows the detail of the back of the Numidian shield. The flat profile and narrow rim are clearly visible, and the wide, central loop can be seen across the upper arm of the figure. The position of this loop may be a mistake by the sculptor. The loop should probably be across the thickest part of the forearm. (Leemage/ Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

These shield designs are undoubtedly spectacular, and their presence on the weapons friezes at Chimtou and Kbor Klib certainly supports the interpretation of these monuments as 'static victory parades' intended to show off the arms and equipment of the Numidian army. It is not clear, however, to what extent these decorated shields reflect what was actually carried by Numidian troops. They may represent 'parade' shields, borne only during ceremonial occasions, perhaps by an elite corps of the Numidian military, such as the 'royal cavalry' mentioned by Sallust (54.4) and in *The African War* (56).

It is possible that such a unit even carried decorated shields into battle. Indeed, the fact that these shields carry designs associated with protection from harm suggests that Numidian soldiers may have done so, as the supernatural power they hoped to invoke with these symbols would have been of far less use on the parade ground than the battlefield. The highly decorated shields on the 'royal monuments' may therefore represent stylized versions of much simpler shield designs routinely carried by Numidian troops. The fact that the shields shown on the Soumaâ tomb and in the depiction of Numidian cavalry on Trajan's Column are without designs does not deny this: the shields could originally have been painted. Neither is the literary sources' silence on this subject decisive – the ancient authors rarely described shields or their decoration.

Trajan's Column provides the only images we have of the back of the Numidian circular cavalry shield. All of the horsemen carry their shields in their left hand, as they do on the Abizar steles, but here more than half show the rear of the shield. On the back of two of these we can see the sculptor's depiction of the grips. In one case, the rider is holding a narrow strap, or handle, in his left hand, which is attached to the edge of the shield just inside the rim. In the second example, a wider loop is shown, possibly attached to the back of the shield with a rivet (note the small circle cut into the strap), through which the rider has slipped his arm past the elbow. The position of this loop is almost certainly a

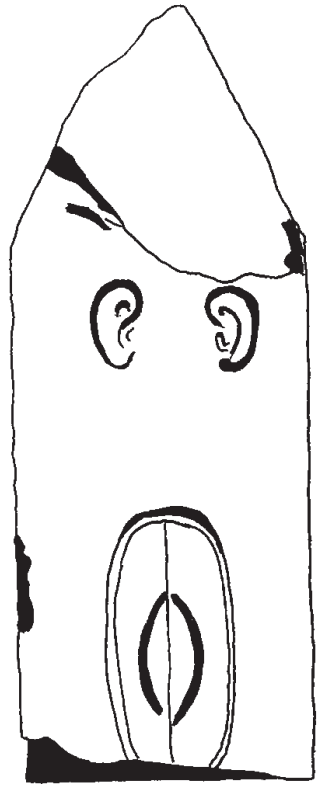
Detail of one of the figures on the Aemilius Paullus monument at Delphi, Greece, which commemorates the Roman victory over the Macedonians at the battle of Pydna in 168 BC. Note the 'overhand' grip used to hold the oval shield by the central handle. (Colin Whiting/ Wikimedia/CC BY-SA 4.0)

mistake on the part of the sculptor: if the shield was attached above the elbow (rather than across the forearm as was the case for the Greek *aspis*, or hoplite shield, for example) and the strap near the rim grasped in the hand, the bearer would be unable to straighten his arm. This would impede both the ability of the horseman to control his mount, and move his shield around his body in order to fight effectively. The wide, central loop was therefore more likely to have been intended to sit across the thickest part of the forearm. Numidian cavalry shields may have also had a longer carrying strap. Livy mentions (22.48) that, in the same act of subterfuge at the battle of Cannae mentioned above, when a unit of 500 Numidian horsemen hid swords beneath their tunics, they approached the Roman line with their shields slung on their backs.

The circular cavalry shield remained the main defensive weapon of North African cavalry long after the kingdom of Numidia became a Roman province. There is some evidence that it was even used by some regular units of the Roman Army. The historian and archaeologist Michael Speidel (1993) has identified three Roman soldiers' gravestones on which the deceased is shown holding a small, round shield, rather than the large, oval shield usually carried by Roman cavalry, as well as small javelins. He argued these gravestones show that the traditional arms and equipment of the Numidian horseman were so well suited to the kind of low-intensity warfare and long-distance patrolling carried out by the Roman cavalry fighting in the African border regions that the small, round shield was adopted as the standard equipment of regular units operating in this area.

The oval or oblong infantry shield, known as a *scutum* to the Romans, and a *thyreos* to the Greeks, was in common use across the Mediterranean by the 3rd century BC. It is thus not surprising that we find so many

The fourth Numidian votive or funerary stele from El Hofra, now held at the Louvre (AO 5274). An oblong shield with a longitudinal rib and large, oval boss is crudely incised into the stone. The 'ear' motif may be a symbol associated with protection: 'ears' are also moulded onto the helmet found in the Soumaâ tomb. (Drawn by W. Horsted)



Statue of a Celtic warrior found near Avignon, France. The long 'spindle'-shaped boss and the metal reinforcement can be seen clearly. This is likely to be the type of shield represented on the El Hofra stele with the helmet, javelins and sword. (DEA/A. DAGLI ORTI/Getty Images)

representations of shields of this type in Numidian epigraphy, or that one was buried alongside other weapons in the elite Soumaâ tomb. These shields were usually constructed of thin planks of wood glued or nailed together in layers in alternate directions, then covered in hide or felt. Most have a central wooden boss, which is hollowed out behind to provide a fixing point for a longitudinal hand grip. The boss is often extended into a 'spindle' shape, tapering towards the top and bottom of the shield, and in some cases reinforced with metal, which is riveted to the face of the shield through wing-shaped flanges of various designs. The rim of these shields could be further strengthened with hide, or even strips of iron, to reduce the effectiveness of sword cuts.

The 'royal monument' at Chimtou features a relief carving of a very elegant oval shield, with a slender boss that runs the whole length of the face, and a fine rim running around the edge. Three of the steles from El Hofra are carved with images of oblong shields. One has a full-length boss and no visible rim; in another the rim is very pronounced and the extended 'spindle'-shaped boss is reinforced with metal. The third stele (see page 39), now held by the Louvre (Département des Antiquités orientales, AO 5274), displays a very crude, incised image of an oblong shield with a longitudinal rib and large, oval boss.

The wide variation in shapes and styles within such a small body of epigraphic source material means that it is impossible to identify a particular 'Numidian' infantry shield type. We do, however, have an indication that at least some Numidian shields may have been of unique construction. The Roman historian Sallust tells us (94.1) that when a picked band of Roman soldiers had to climb a steep cliff to lead an attack on Jugurtha's camp, rather than their own *scuta* they chose to carry Numidian shields made of hide because they were lighter, and would not make as much noise if knocked. Sallust may be referring here to the light, round cavalry shields discussed above, but it is possible that at least some Numidian infantry shields were also made only of hide stretched over a wooden or wicker frame.

Helmets

None of the epigraphic sources shows Numidian cavalry wearing helmets, and the only depiction of Numidian foot soldiers – the five spearmen on the Tazrout stele – is too degraded to tell. Both the two 'royal' figures illustrated on the Tirekbine steles are bareheaded, and no Numidian king appears on his coin wearing anything on his head except a *diadem* or laurel wreath. The inclusion of a helmet in the collection of weapons shown on one of the El Hofra steles and in the Soumaâ panoply does suggest, however, that helmets were worn – if only by some, possibly elite, members of the Numidian army.

The Soumaâ helmet was excavated in 1915 in several badly corroded pieces, which, when reconstructed, revealed an iron helmet with a distinct conical shape, a projection at the rear to protect the neck, and a veristic 'ear' crafted onto each side. The shape of this helmet is usually associated with civilizations to the east of the Mediterranean, in Asia Minor, Persia, Transcaucasia and Assyria (Waurick 1979: 305–18). Helmets of this style were probably also worn by the Carthaginians. Carthage was founded by the Phoenicians, who spread across the Mediterranean from the Levantine coast. It would not have been surprising if the early Numidian elite styled their panoplies on that of the Carthaginians: the Numidians

had strong ties with their powerful neighbour, and at least up to the end of the Second Punic War, intermarriage between Numidian and Carthaginian noble families was common.

The significance of the 'ear' decoration is not clear, but the fact that 'ears' also appear above a shield on one of the El Hofra steles suggests that it was a symbol with some religious significance to the Numidians. As both the helmet and shield are worn to prevent injury in battle, it may be that 'ears' are associated in some way with protection from harm, much like the huge, distorted 'eye' and 'aegis and gorgon' symbols so beautifully depicted on the shields on the Chimtou 'royal monument'. Two things may be inferred about this helmet: first, that as the (perhaps uniquely Numidian) 'ear' symbol is also found on a Numidian votive stele in a similarly 'protective' context, this helmet may well be of native Numidian origin; second, like the shield designs, the 'protective' nature of the 'ear' symbol suggests that this helmet was intended to be worn in battle, where the supernatural forces the wearer hoped to invoke would have been of most use.

The helmet illustrated on the El Hofra stele has a roughly similar shape to the reconstructed helmet from the Soumaâ tomb, and scholars have claimed that they are the same. The helmet on the stele is not, however, depicted clearly enough to identify with any certainty what type of helmet the sculptor intended to represent. The 'point' on the top, for example, may actually be a plume holder, as found on the top of Montefortino-type helmets, like those adopted by the Romans in the 3rd century BC. The 'band' around the base is also confusing: it could be supposed to represent a 'peak', or perhaps a 'rim' of some kind.

Armour

The Numidian cavalry did not normally wear armour, and probably neither did the infantry. Cuirasses of various kinds are, however, shown on the Numidian 'royal monuments' and the San Omobono monument

On the San Omobono monument base there remains a single relief image of a shield with an unusual shape. It is emblazoned with a mythical winged serpent and a rim patterned with the wave design familiar from the shields at Kbor Klib. Given the San Omobono relief's similarities to the Numidian 'royal monuments', Kuttner suggests (2013: 266) that this shield type may be uniquely Numidian. The particular shape is not found elsewhere, and it likely represents a 'votive' object, i.e. one made for religious or ritual display. As such, there is no suggestion that a shield of this style was ever carried into battle by Numidian troops, but it is certainly possible that it was carried on ceremonial occasions. (By kind permission of Mario De Matteis)

Stone block from the weapons frieze on the 'royal monument' at Chimtou, now part of the reconstruction in the Chimtou Museum. The round shield has the typical flat profile, and the characteristic narrow rim of Numidian cavalry shields. The design is an *aegis*, a mythical animal skin with the head of a gorgon at its centre, believed to bring protection. The cuirass is a *linothorax*, either of the original stiffened-linen construction, or perhaps made of mail. (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom, Chimtou Archiv)

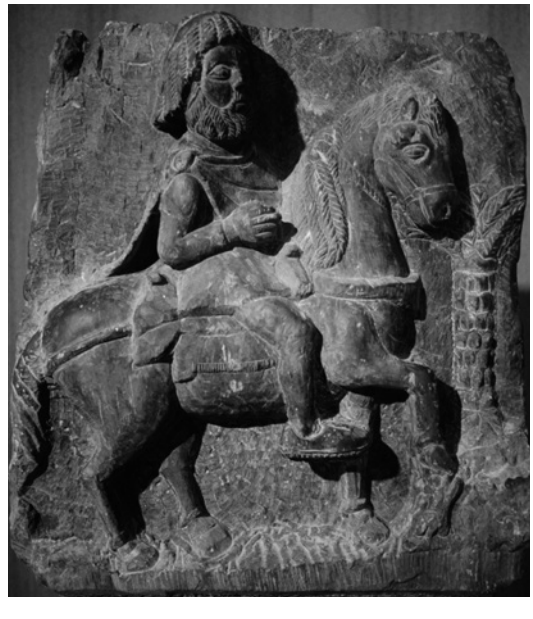
base, which, like the shields they accompany, may represent Numidian parade armour or perhaps the equipment of an elite unit, such as the 'royal cavalry' mentioned in the literary sources. Fragments of a mail tunic were also found in the Soumaâ tomb.

Two very detailed facsimiles of Greek-style *linothorax* cuirasses survive from the 'royal monument' at Chimtou. Cuirasses of this type were originally made of several layers of linen glued together to form a stiff 'shirt', and their low cost, light weight and flexibility made them a popular alternative to bronze 'muscled' cuirasses among Greek hoplites from the 6th century BC (Connolly 2016: 57–58). The main part of the cuirass covered the chest, and was fastened on the left side. A separate piece, attached to the back, was drawn forward over each shoulder and laced on to the front on both sides. The loops for securing the shoulder pieces can be seen clearly on the carved reliefs from Chimtou. Two layers of linen strips, or *pteryges*, hung from the bottom edge of the cuirass to cover the groin, backside and upper thighs. This provided some protection to these areas while maintaining maximum freedom of movement, and would certainly have allowed a soldier wearing this kind of armour to mount and ride a horse. Some examples also had a similar fringe of linen strips hanging from each shoulder to cover the upper arm.

Mail armour appeared around the beginning of the 3rd century BC. It probably originated with the Celts, but quickly spread around the Mediterranean. Mail was very expensive to produce, however, so its use would have been mainly restricted to elites. According to Polybius (6.23), mail was worn by wealthier Roman legionaries in the middle of the 2nd century BC, but was probably adopted by those members of the Roman Army who could afford it much earlier, at least by the time of the Second Punic War. It appears that early Roman mail tunics were modelled on the *linothorax*, with sheets of mail replacing the stiffened linen. Roman soldiers can be seen wearing mail tunics of this style in the reliefs decorating the Domitius Ahenobarbus statuary

BELOW LEFT
Relief block from the weapons frieze on the Numidian 'royal monument' at Chimtou showing a *linothorax* cuirass and an oval shield with a long, tapering rib and finely modelled rim. Unfortunately, the shape of the boss is not visible because the carving has been damaged. (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Rom, Chimtou Archiv)

BELOW RIGHT
Relief of a horseman from Simmithus, Numidia (modern-day Chimtou in Tunisia). This stele probably dates from the 1st–3rd centuries AD, when Numidia was a Roman province. The horseman has long, braided hair and a carefully styled beard, but his horse wears a bridle and a Roman, four-horned saddle. (DEA/Archivio J. Lange/ Getty Images)

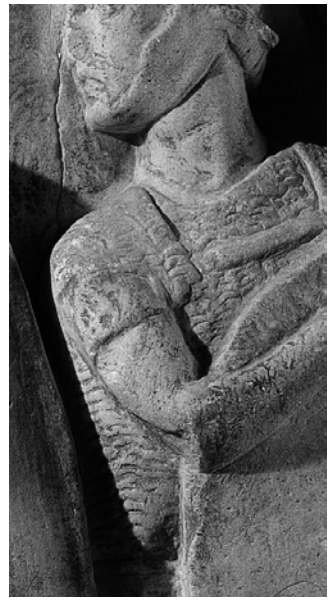


base (2nd century BC), which is now on display in the Louvre, and the Aemilius Paullus monument commemorating the Roman defeat of the Macedonians at the battle of Pydna in 168 BC.

The *linothorax* cuirasses so accurately depicted on the 'royal monument' at Chimtou may therefore also have been made from mail. Unfortunately, it was not possible to reconstruct the mail tunic deposited in the Soumaâ tomb from the small, corroded fragments excavated in 1915 – but if the Soumaâ is, as is widely believed, the grave of the Numidian king Micipsa, it is reasonable to assume that his mail tunic would have been cut in the same style as the cuirasses carved into his own monument.

Three different styles of armour appear on the San Omobono monument base. On one stone block, next to a round, flat Numidian-style shield emblazoned with a cavalryman on a rearing horse, is a plain but elegant 'muscled' cuirass, complete with a fringe of *pteryges* hanging from carefully sculpted hips and lower abdomen, and a greave, or lower leg armour, ornamented with the face of Hercules. On another block, a matching pair of cuirasses are shown mounted on tree trunks, either side of another round cavalry shield, accompanied by Boeotian-style helmets with cheek-guards and transverse horsehair crests. These appear to be Roman armours, and the transverse crests suggest that they may have belonged to centurions. It is not clear why the cuirasses are depicted in this way; it certainly makes no sense to interpret this as a display of 'war booty'. To the left of these is a very detailed relief facsimile of a Hellenistic-style cuirass, with shoulders embellished with images of the winged goddess Victory, and a large gorgon moulded on to the centre of the chest. A sash of the kind seen on Roman officers' armour is neatly tied around the middle.

The armours on the San Omobono monument base are clearly not designed for battle, and if they were worn at all it would only have been for ceremonial occasions. These cuirasses may be an attempt to illustrate parade armour worn by the Numidian kings, or perhaps exquisite presents given by the Romans to Micipsa or his father Masinissa in gratitude for their support against the Carthaginians. We know that the Romans made such donations. According to Livy (30.17), in 203 BC the Roman senate sent Masinissa two purple cloaks, two tunics with broad stripes, two horses, two complete sets of cavalry armour, and the tents and furniture that a Roman consul would have used on campaign.



Two details of the relief on the Domitius Ahenobarbus statuary base, now held in the Louvre and dating from the end of the 2nd century BC, showing Roman legionaries wearing mail tunics modelled on *linothorax* linen cuirasses. (DEA/G. DAGLI ORTI/ Getty Images)

CONCLUSION

The Numidian light cavalry are well known from literary descriptions and their portrayal on Trajan's Column. As this book has shown, however, there is a significant body of literary and non-literary evidence for the appearance, weapons and equipment of other types of Numidian troops. In particular, the epigraphic evidence from the Numidian 'royal monuments' and various steles suggest how an elite 'royal cavalry' may have looked, at least on ceremonial occasions. Recently discovered steles, such as that found at Tazrout in 2007 may yet yield further evidence, and hopefully more archaeological material will be found in the future to further our understanding of the armies of this under-examined kingdom.

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PLATE COMMENTARIES

A: HUNTING PARTY

A1 & A2: Numidian tribesmen

Based upon Strabo's description (17.3.7) of Numidian and other North Africans, these tribesmen are depicted at the conclusion of a successful hunting trip in central Numidia, mid-3rd century BC. They are dressed in animal skins. The hair and beard of A1 are copied from a portrait of the Numidian king Masinissa on a coin. The horse is a typical Numidian animal, as described by Aelian (3.2). The neck collar the horse wears instead of a bridle is copied from that shown on the Numidian cavalry horses depicted on Trajan's Column.

A3: Numidian chieftain

This chieftain's unusual hairstyle is based on that portrayed on one of the Tirekbine steles, and Strabo's description (17.3.7). The Numidians took enormous care over their hair, and often avoided touching each other in case they disturbed their elaborate coiffures. His fringed leather tunic is similar to that worn by the Numidian 'chieftain' terracotta statuette in the Louvre (Cp 5223), and his javelins and elephant-hide shield are the weapons of the horsemen on the Abizar steles.

B: TRAINING THE NUMIDIAN ARMY

B1: Quintus Statorius

Depicted in 213 BC during the training of the Numidian king Syphax's army, the Roman centurion Quintus Statorius holds a *vitis*, or 'vine staff', the traditional symbol of rank carried by Roman centurions. His mail tunic is similar to those worn by Roman legionaries depicted on the Domitius Ahenobarbus monument base reliefs, and his helmet is of the Montefortino type, with a red transverse crest of horsehair like those shown on the San Omobono monument base.

B2: Numidian infantry recruit

This young man wears the short woollen tunic of the Numidian horsemen depicted on Trajan's Column. He is trying to hold the stance that Livy tells us (8.8) was adopted by the Roman *triarii* spearmen. His oval shield is based on one of the reliefs on the Numidian 'royal monument' at Chimtou.

B3: Numidian infantry recruit

A second recruit carries the round elephant-hide shield and 'atrophied antennae' sword depicted on one of the steles excavated from the El Hofra sanctuary in Cirta and held by the National Museum Cirta (inv. 3.C). In the background is a sprawling camp of traditional Numidian thatched huts, or mapalia, as described by Livy (30.4).

C: THE DEATH OF SOPHONISBA, 203 BC

In a sumptuously decorated room in the palace of the recently captured Numidian king Syphax, his former wife Sophonisba lies dying. She has collapsed in the arms of her new husband, the rival Numidian king Masinissa, whom she has married earlier that day. Sophonisba has taken poison given to her by Masinissa, who wants to save her from being taken to Rome with Syphax as a prisoner of the Roman general Scipio. Scipio himself has just entered the room to remonstrate with Masinissa for his hasty marriage, only to find Sophonisba dying and Masinissa defiant.

'The death of Sophonisba', as recounted by Livy (30. 12–15), has inspired many artists. This plate is a copy of two famous Roman wall paintings from houses in Pompeii. The first was removed from the wall in the Casa de Guiseppe II on which it was found and moved to the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, where it underwent some restoration and is fairly well preserved. The other has remained in place on the wall of the Casa del Fabbro in Pompeii and has not survived in such good condition. They were probably painted during or just after the reign of the emperor Augustus, 200 years after the event they depict, and were painted for a wealthy Roman audience. Masinissa's shield bears the 'aegis and gorgon' decoration of one of the shield reliefs on the Numidian 'royal monument' at Chimtou.

C1: Masinissa

Masinissa's appearance is based upon his coin portraits, rather than the wall paintings in Pompeii. He wears a *diadem*, a white ribbon worn by Hellenistic monarchs as symbol of monarchy. His purple mantle is Roman.

C2: Sophonisba

Livy describes Sophonisba as 'blooming with all the beauty of youth' (30.12), and this is how she is portrayed here, rather than the rather 'matronly' figure in the wall paintings. Her clothing is Roman.

C3: Publius Cornelius Scipio 'Africanus'

Scipio wears a red military tunic and a purple *paludamentum*, the cloak worn by Roman generals instead of a toga while on campaign. His appearance is based on a marble bust in the Musei Capitolini, Rome (inv. MC 562), which scholars believe could show Scipio Africanus.

C4: African slave

The Numidians' southern neighbours, the Garamantes, captured tribespeople from the edges of the Sahara and Nubia and sold them as slaves throughout North Africa.

Roman coin issued by the Roman general Sulla (138–78 BC) to commemorate his capture of the Numidian king Jugurtha in 106 BC with the aid of the Mauretanian king Bocchus. Jugurtha can be seen kneeling in chains behind Sulla, who is seated on a throne receiving an olive branch from Bocchus. Note the long tunics worn by the African leaders, which hang in loose folds across their knees. (De Agostini/Getty Images)

D: MASINISSA AND HIS BODYGUARD BEFORE ZAMA, 202 BC

D1: Masinissa

The Numidian king Masinissa greets soldiers of his royal guard outside his tent as he prepares to inspect his troops. He is wearing some of the clothing that Livy (30.15; 30.17) tells us was given to him as a gift by Scipio and the Roman senate after the capture of Syphax in 203 BC. Other senatorial gifts, including furniture and armour, are shown in the background. Masinissa's purple tunic is the *tunica palmata*, decorated with golden palm branches, which was worn by Roman generals celebrating a triumph, normally in conjunction with a *toga picta*, or 'painted toga'. Masinissa has chosen to wear a *paludamentum* instead. He is carrying a Roman ivory sceptre.

D2: Numidian royal guardsman

This man wears the linen tunic or *linothorax* depicted on the 'royal monument' at Chimtou and the conical 'eared' helmet from the Soumaâ tomb. The shield is based upon the Numidian cavalry shields depicted on Trajan's Column. His javelins are like those found in the Soumaâ tomb.

D3: Numidian royal guardsman

The *linothorax*-type cuirass shown on the 'royal monument' at Chimtou may have been made from mail, and is recreated here in this material. The helmet and javelins are those found in the Soumaâ tomb, and the shield decoration is taken from the 'royal monument' at Chimtou.

E: NUMIDIAN LIGHT CAVALRY ATTACK A LIGURIAN VILLAGE

This plate recreates an episode described by Livy (35.11), when a Numidian auxiliary cavalry force saved a Roman column that had been trapped in a narrow pass by a Ligurian army in 193 BC.

E1: Numidian chieftain

The wounded chieftain is based upon a terracotta figurine of a mounted Numidian on display in the Louvre (Cp 5223). He wears a short, fringed leather tunic, and holds a round, hide shield like those carried by the horsemen depicted on Trajan's Column. His empty scabbard is copied from the example found in the Soumaâ tomb.

E2: Numidian cavalryman

The appearance of this figure is based upon a photograph of a terracotta statuette that was formerly held by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The horseman wears a woollen cloak over his tunic, and carries water in a *calabash*, a dried and hollowed gourd.

E3: Ligurian tribesman

The Ligurians lived in north-west Italy, and they fought many wars against the Romans before their territory was incorporated into the Roman Empire. This tribesman is based on a description by the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (5.39).

E4: Numidian cavalryman

A Numidian cavalryman leaps from one galloping horse to another, in the manner described by Livy (23.29).

F: THE ROMAN–SELEUCID WAR, 190 BC

F1: Numidian *mahout* riding an elephant

The elephant and rider depicted here are based upon an image on a Punic coin. The *mahout* holds an *ankus*, or goad,

used to control the animal. He also carries a heavy mallet and a bag containing a carpenter's chisel. According to Livy (27.49), if the *mahout* lost control of the elephant in battle, he would ram the chisel into the joint where its head and neck met with a hefty blow from the mallet in order to kill the animal before it could do further damage.

F2: Numidian infantryman

This foot soldier is much more heavily equipped than the average Numidian light infantryman. He is armed with the shield, sword and javelins depicted on one of the El Hofra steles held in the National Museum Cirta (inv. 3.C). He also wears a mail cuirass and Montefortino-type helmet.

G: JUGURTHA AT THE SIEGE OF NUMANTIA, 134 BC

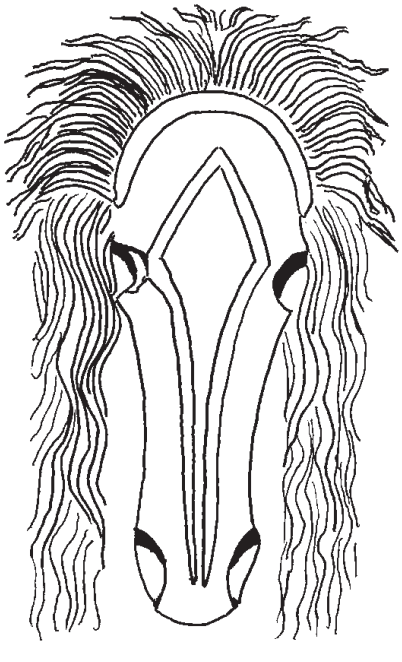
In 134 BC, during the final stages of the Roman siege of Numantia in northern Spain, the Numidian king Micipsa sent his nephew Jugurtha to help the Romans. The Numidian contingent included slingers and archers, as well as javelinmen, cavalry and elephants.

G1: Jugurtha

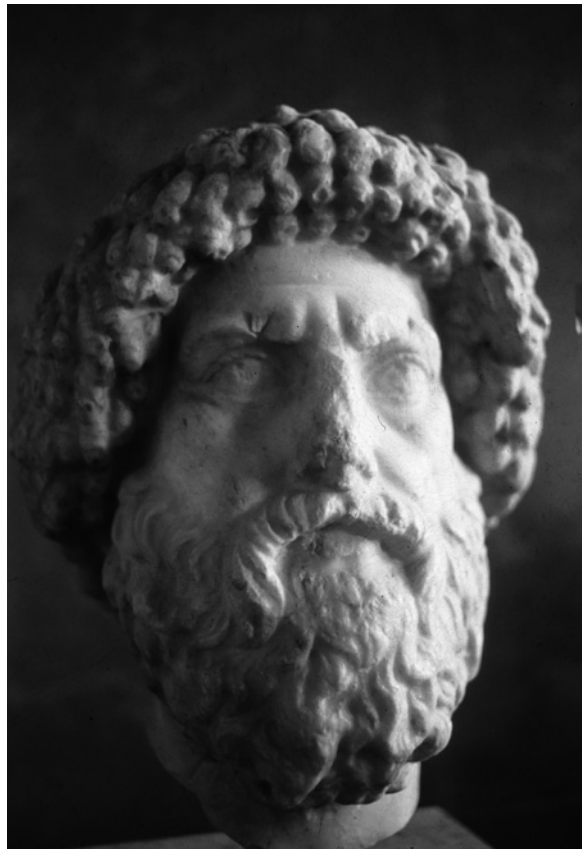
The Numidian prince Jugurtha is described by the historian Sallust (6.1) as strong and athletic: he excelled at javelin throwing, running and equestrianism. Here he is shown in the beautiful armour depicted on the San Omobono monument base, which may represent a gift given to Jugurtha's uncle Micipsa by the Roman senate. His horse wears face armour, which is also shown on the San Omobono monument base.

G2: Numidian archer

This archer uses a composite bow made of wood, horn and sinew. His dagger is of an Iberian pattern, probably collected locally. Daggers of this kind may have provided the prototype for the *pugio*, the dagger carried by Roman legionaries.



A *chamfron*, or horse face armour, depicted in relief on the San Omobono monument base. This may represent armour gifted to the Numidian kings by the Romans. (Drawn by W. Horsted)



Statue of Juba I, king of Numidia 60–46 BC. Note his unusual hairstyle, which can also be seen in his coin portraits (see page 17). Juba I allied his kingdom with Caesar's enemies in the Roman civil war of 49–45 BC. After Caesar's victory at the battle of Thapsus in 46 BC, the Numidian king chose to commit suicide in single combat with the Roman general Marcus Petreius rather than face the humiliation of capture. (Marka/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

G3 & G4: Numidian slingers

These two Numidians use slings made of woven vegetable fibre to hurl missiles made of baked clay over the city walls. Missiles could also be made of natural stone or moulded from lead. In the background a unit of Numidian light infantry launches a volley of javelins, and Numidian cavalry and elephants prepare to assault the city walls.

H: AFRICAN CAVALRY IN THE FIRST DACIAN WAR

By the beginning of the 2nd century AD Numidia as a kingdom no longer existed, as it had been absorbed by the Roman Empire, but it is surprising how little the appearance of the light cavalry from the region appears to have changed since the Punic Wars. The North Africans depicted on Trajan's Column wear woollen tunics, knotted over the right shoulder. All the original paint has been lost, therefore it is not possible to know whether the tunics were originally dyed a particular colour, so here they are shown as undyed wool. Note the carrying straps on the back of the shields. The construction of the shields is conjectural. The horses have no saddles or bridles, and wear only a simple collar of plaited vegetable fibre.

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Title-page illustration: The 'Death of Sophonisba' as depicted in a Roman fresco dating from 20 BC–AD 25, recovered from the Casa di Giuseppe II in Pompeii and now in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli (Room LXXI, inv. 8968). This wall painting shows the moment Sophonisba, the daughter of the Carthaginian general Hasdrubal, drinks from a cup of poison and dies in the arms of the Numidian prince Masinissa. The Roman general Scipio looks on. See Plate C. (Mondadori Portfolio/Hulton Fine Art Collection/Getty Images)